

Report by Captain Witold Pilecki

Translated from Polish by Jacek Kucharski *

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Part I

1940

PRE-PLANNED ARREST

Thus, I am expected to describe bare facts only, as my colleagues want it. It was said: “The more strictly you will adhere to nothing but facts, relating them without comments, the more valuable it will be”. So, I will try... but we were not made of wood... not to say of stone (but it seemed to me that also stone had sometimes to perspire). Sometimes, among facts being related, I will insert my thought, to express what was felt then. I do not think if it must needs decrease the value of what is to be written. We were not made of stone – I was often jealous of it – our hearts were beating – often in our throats, with some thought rattling somewhere, probably in our heads, which thought I sometimes caught with difficulty... About them – adding some feelings from time to time – I think that it is only now when the right picture can be rendered.

On 19 September 1940 – the second street round-up in Warsaw. Several people are still alive, who saw me walk alone at 6:00 a.m. and stand in the “fives” arranged of people rounded up in the street by SS-men. Then we were loaded into trucks in Wilson Square and carried to the Cavalry barracks. Upon registration of our personal data and taking away any sharp-edged tools (under threat of shooting down if just a safety-razor blade was found on anybody later) we were carried into a manège, where we stayed during 19 and 20 September.

During those several days some of us could get acquainted with a rubber baton falling down upon their heads. Nevertheless it was

within the limits of acceptable measures, for people accustomed to such ways of keeping law by guardians of order. In that time some families bribed out their loved ones free, having paid huge sums to SS-men. In the night we all slept side by side on the ground. A large reflector placed by the entrance lit the manege. SS-men with machine guns were arranged in the four sides.

There were one thousand eight hundred and several tens of us. I personally was upset by the passiveness of the mass of Poles. All those rounded up became imbibed with a kind of a psychosis of the crowd, which in that time expressed itself in that, that the whole crowd was similar to a herd of sheep.

I was haunted by a simple idea: to agitate the minds, to stir the mass to an action. I proposed to my companion Sławek Szpakowski (I know he was alive until the Warsaw Uprising) a common action in the night: to get the crowd under our control, to attack the posts, in which my task would be – on my way to the toilet – to “brush against” the reflector and destroy it. But the purpose of my presence in this environment was quite different, while the latter option would mean to agree to much smaller things. In general, he considered this idea to be out of the sphere of fantasy.

TRANSPORTATION

On 21 September in the morning we were loaded into trucks and, accompanied by escort motor cycles with machine guns, we were transported to the West Railway Station and loaded into goods-vans. Apparently, lime had been transported by those vans before, as the whole floor was scattered with it. The vans were locked up. We were on transport the whole day. Neither drink nor food was given. After all, nobody wanted to eat. We had some bread given out to us on the preceding day, which we did not know how to eat and how to value. We only desired something to drink very much. Under the influence of shocks, lime was getting powdered. It was rising into the air, excited our nostrils and throats. They did not give us any drink. Through interstices of planks with which the windows were nailed up, we saw we were transported somewhere in the direction of Częstochowa. About 10:00 p. m. the train stopped in some place and it continued its way no more. Shouts, cries were heard, opening of railway vans, barking of dogs.

In my memories I would call that place the moment in which I had done with everything what had existed on Earth so far, and began something which was probably somewhere outside me. I say it not to exert myself to some weird words, descriptions. On the contrary – I think I do not need to exert myself to any nice-sounding but inessential words. So it was. Not only the gun butts of SS-men struck our heads – something more struck them also. All our ideas were kicked off in a brutal way, to which ideas

we had been acquainted on the Earth (to some order of matters, i.e. law). All that fizzled out. They tried to strike us most radically. To break us mentally as soon as possible.

The hum and clatter of voices was approaching gradually. At last, the door of our van was opened vehemently. Reflectors directed inside blinded us.

— Heraus! rrraus! rrraus! – shouts sounded out, while SS-men's butts fell upon the shoulders, backs and heads of my colleagues.

We had to land outside quickly. I sprang off and, exceptionally, I did not get any blow of a gun butt; while forming our fives I happened to get to the centre of the column. A pack of SS-men were beating, kicking and making incredible noise “zu Fünfte!” Dogs, set on us by the ruffian soldiers, were jumping at those who stood in the edges of the fives. Blinded by reflectors, pushed, kicked, assailed by dogs being set on us, we were suddenly placed in such conditions, in which I doubt if anyone of us had been placed before. The weaker of us were bewildered to such a degree, that they formed a really thoughtless group.

We were driven forward, towards a larger group of concentrated lights. On the way one of us was ordered to run towards a pole aside from the road and a machine gun burst was let off at him at once. Killed. Ten colleagues were pulled out of our ranks at random and shot down on the way with the use of machine guns, under “joint and several responsibility” for an “escape”, which was arranged by the SS-men themselves. All the eleven people were being dragged on straps tied to one of the legs of each of them. Dogs were irritated by the bleeding corpses and were set on them. All that was accompanied by laugh and scoffs.

3

RECEPTION AND ACCOMMODATION – “IN HELL”

We were approaching the gate in a wire fence, on which an inscription: “Arbeit macht frei” was placed. Later on we learned to understand it well. Behind the fence, brick buildings were arranged in rows, among them there was a vast square. Standing among a line of SS-men, just before the gate, we had more quiet for a while. The dogs were kept off, we were ordered to dress up our fives. Here we were counted scrupulously – with the addition, in the end, of the dragged dead corpses. The high and at that time still single-line fence of barbed wire and the gate full of SS-men brought a Chinese aphorism to my mind: “On your coming in, think of your retreat, then on your coming out you will get unharmed”... An ironic smile arose inside me and abated... of what use would it be here?

Behind the wires, on the vast square, another view struck us. In somewhat fantastic reflector light creeping on us from all sides, some pseudo-people could be seen. By their behaviour, similar rather to wild animals (here I certainly give offence to animals – there is no designation in our language for such creatures). In strange, striped dresses, like those seen in films about the Sing-Sing, with some orders on coloured ribbons (I got such an impression in the flickering light), with sticks in their hands, they assailed our colleagues while laughing aloud. By beating their heads, kicking those lying on the ground in their kidneys and other sensitive places, jumping with boots upon their chests and

bellies – they were afflicting death with some kind of nightmarish enthusiasm.

“Ah! So we are locked up in a lunatic asylum!...” – a thought flashed inside me. – What a mean deed! – I was reasoning by the categories of the Earth. People from a street round-up – that is, even in the opinion of Germans, not charged with any guilt against the Third Reich. There flashed in my mind some words of Janek W., who had told me after the first street round-up (in August) in Warsaw. “Pooh! You see, people caught in the street are not charged with any political case – this is the safest way to get into the camp”. How naively, over there in Warsaw, we tackled the matter of Poles deported to the camps. No political case was necessary to die here. Any first comer would be killed at random.

In the beginning, a question was tossed by a striped man with a stick: “Was bist du von zivil?” An answer like: priest, judge, barrister, resulted in beating and death.

Before me, a colleague stood in a five, who, upon the question tossed to him with parallel grasping him by his clothes below his throat, answered: “Richter”. A fatal idea! In a while he was on the ground, beaten and kicked.

So, educated classes were to be done away first of all. Upon that observation I changed my mind a bit. They were not madmen they were some monstrous tool used to murder Poles, which started its task from the educated classes.

We were terribly thirsty. Pots with some beverage were just delivered. The same people, who had been killing us, were distributing round mugs of that beverage along our ranks, while asking: “Was bist du von zivil?” We got that desired, that is wet beverage, and mentioned some trade of a worker or a craftsmen. And those pseudo-people, while beating and kicking us, shouted:... “hier ist KL Auschwitz – mein lieber Mann!”

We asked each other, what that meant? Some knew that here was Oświęcim, but for us it was only the name of a Polish small town – the monstrous opinion of that camp had not have enough

time to reach Warsaw, and it was also not known in the world. It was somewhat later that this word made the blood of people at freedom to run cold, kept prisoners of Pawiak, Montelupi, Wiśnicz, Lublin awake in the night. One of colleagues explained us we were inside the barracks of the 5th Squadron of Horse Artillery. – just near the town of Oświęcim.

We were informed that we were a “zugang” of Polish gangsters, who assailed the quiet German population and who would face due penalty for that. Everything, what arrived to the camp, each new transport, was called “zugang”.

In the meantime the attendance record was being checked, our names given by us in Warsaw were being shouted out, which must be answered quickly and loudly “Hier!” It was accompanied by many reasons for vexation and beating. After the check-up, we were sent to the grandiloquently called “bath”. In such way transports of people rounded up in the streets of Warsaw, supposedly for work in Germany, were received, in such way every transport was received in initial months after the establishment of the Oświęcim camp (14 June 1940).

Out of darkness somewhere in the above (from above the kitchen) our butcher Seidler spoke: “Let nobody of you think, he will ever go out of here alive... your ration is calculated in such a way that you will live for 6 weeks, whoever will live longer... it means he steals – he will be placed in the Special Commando – where you will live short!” what was translated into Polish by Władysław Baworowski – a camp interpreter. This was aimed to cause as quick mental breakdown as possible.

We put all the bread we had into wheel-barrows and a “rollwaga” carried into the square. Nobody regretted it at that time – nobody was thinking about eating. How often, later, upon a mere recollection of that made our mouths water and made us furious. Several wheel-barrows plus a rollwaga full of bread! – What a pity, that it was impossible to eat our fill, for the future.

Together with a hundred of other people I at last reached the bathroom ('Baderaum', block 19, old numbering). Here we gave everything away, into bags, to which respective numbers were tied. Here our hairs of head and body were cut off and we were slightly sprinkled by nearly cold water. Here my two teeth were broken out, for that I was bearing a record tag with my number in my hand instead in my teeth, as it was required on that particular day by the bathroom chief ("Bademeister"). I got a blow in my jaws with a heavy rod. I spat out my two teeth. Bleeding began...

Since that moment we became mere numbers. The official name read as following: "Schutzhäftling kr...xy..." I wore the number 4859. Its two thirteens (made out of the central and the edge figures) confirmed my colleagues in a conviction that I would die, but I was very glad of them.

We were given white-blue striped dresses, denim ones, the same like those, which had shocked us so much in the night. It was evening (of 22 September 1940). Many things became clear now. The pseudo-people wore yellow bands with black inscription "CAPO" in their left arm, while instead of the coloured medal ribbons, as it had seemed to me in the night, they had on their chests, on the left side, a coloured triangle, "winkel", and below it, as if in the end of a ribbon, a small black number placed on a small white patch.

The winkels were in five colours. Political offenders wore a red one, criminals – green ones, those despising work in the Third Reich – black ones, Bible Students – violet ones, homosexuals – pink ones. Poles rounded up in the street in Warsaw for work in Germany, were assigned, by all accounts, red winkels as political offenders. I must admit, that of all the remaining colours – this one suited me best.

Dressed in striped denims, without caps and socks (I was given socks on 8, while cap on 15 December), in wooden shoes falling off our feet, we were led out into a square called the roll-call square, and were divided in two halves. Some went into block 10, others

(we) to block 17, the upper storey. Prisoners (“Häftlinge”) were accommodated both in the ground and in the upper stories of individual blocks. They had a separate management and administrative staff, as to create an autonomous “block”. For a distinction – all blocks in upper storey had letter “a” added to their numbers.

Thus, we were delivered to block 17a, in the hands of our blockman Alois, later called the “Bloody Alois”. He was a German, a communist with red winkel – a degenerate, imprisoned in camps for about six years; he used to beat, torture, torment, and kill several persons a day. He took pleasure in order and in military discipline, he used to dress our ranks by beating with a rod. “Our block”, arranged in the square in 10 rows, dressed by Alois who was running along the rows with his great rod, could be an example of dressing for the future.

Then, in the evening, he was running across our rows for the first time. He was creating a new block out of us, the “zugangs”. He was seeking, among unknown people, some men to keep order in the block. Fate willed it that he chose me, he choose Karol Świątorzecki (a reserve officer of 13th cavalry regiment), Witold Różycki (not that Różycki of bad opinion, this one was a good fellow from Władysława street in Warsaw) and several others. He quickly introduced us into the block, on the upper storey, order us to line in row along the wall, to do about-turn and to lean forward. He “thrashed” each of us five blows for all his worth, in the place apparently assigned for that purpose. We had to clench our teeth tightly, so that no groan would get out... The examination came off – as it seemed to me – well. “Mind you know how it tastes and mind you operate your sticks in this way while taking care of tidiness and order in your block.”

In this way I became room supervisor (“Stubendienst”), but not for long. Although we kept an exemplary order and tidiness, Alois did not like the methods we tried to achieve it. He warned us several times, personally and through Kazik (a confidant of Alois) and when it was of no use, he went mad and evicted some

of us into the camp area for three days, speaking: “Let you taste the work in the camp and better appreciate the roof and quiet you have in the block”. I knew that less and less number of people returned from work day by day – I knew they were “done away” at this work or another, but not until then that I was to learn it to my cost, how a working day of an ordinary prisoner in the camp looked like. Nevertheless, all were obliged to work. Only room supervisors were allowed to remain in blocks.

4

LIVING CONDITIONS. ORDER OF THE DAY. QUASI-FOOD. “TO GO TO THE WIRES”.

We all slept side by side on the floor on spread straw mattresses. In the initial period we had no beds at all. The day commenced for all of us with a sound of gong, in summer at 4:20 a. m., in winter at 3:20 a. m.. Upon that sound, which voiced an inexorable command – we sprung to our feet. We quickly folded our blankets, carefully aligning their edges. The straw mattress was to be carried to one end of the room, where “mattress men “ took it in order to put it into a stacked pile. The blanket was handed in the exit from the room to the “blanket man”. We finished putting on our clothes in the corridor. All that was done running, in haste, but then the Bloody Alois, shouting “Fenster auf!” used to burst with his stick into the hall, and you had to hurry to take your place in a long queue to the toilet. In the initial period we had no toilets in blocks. In the evening we ran to several latrines, where up to two hundred people used to line up in a queue. There were few places. A capo stood with a rod and counted up to five – whoever was late to get up in time, his head was beaten with a stick. Not a few prisoners fell in the pit. From the latrines we rushed to the pumps, several of which were placed on the square (there were no baths in blocks in the initial period). Several thousand people had to wash themselves under the pumps. Of course, it was impossible. You forced your way to the pump and catch some water in your dixy. But your legs must have been clean in the

evening. Block supervisors on their tour inspections in evenings, when the “room supervisor” reported the number of prisoners lying in straw mattresses, checked the cleanness of legs, which had to be put out from under blankets up, so that the “sole” would be visible. If a leg was not sufficiently clean, or if the block supervisor wished to deem it to be such – the delinquent was beaten on a stool. He received from 10 to 20 blows with a stick.

It was one of the ways for us to be done for, effected under the veil of hygiene. Just as it was doing for us, the devastation of organism in latrines by actions done in pace and by order, the nerve-fraying stir at the pumps, the ever-lasting haste and “Laufschritt”, applied everywhere in the initial period of the camp.

From the pump, all ran aside, for the so-called coffee or tea. The liquid was hot, I admit, brought in pots to the rooms, but it imitated those beverages ineffectively. An ordinary, plain prisoner saw no sugar at all. I noticed that some colleagues, who had been here for several months, had swelled faces and legs. Doctors asked by me told that the reason was an excess of liquids. Kidneys or heart broke down – a huge effort of the organism by physical work, with parallel consumption of nearly everything in liquid: coffee, tea, “awo” and soup! I decided to give up liquids of no advantage and to abide by awo and soups.

In general, you should keep your whims under control. Some did not want to resign the hot liquids, because of the cold. Things were worse regarding smoking, as in the initial period of our stay in the camp, a prisoner had no money, as he was not allowed to write a letter at once. He waited for a long time for that, and about three months had passed before a reply came in. Who was not able to control himself and exchanged bread for cigarettes, he was already “digging his own grave”. I knew many such ones – all of them went by the board.

There were no graves. All dead bodies were burnt in a newly erected crematorium.

Thus, I did not hurry for hot slops, others pushed their way, thus giving a reason to be beaten and kicked.

If a prisoner with swelled legs managed to seize a better work and food – he recuperated, his swell went by, but festering abscesses arose on his legs, which discharged a foetid liquid and sometimes flegmona, which I saw for the first time here only. By avoiding liquids, I protected myself from that successfully.

Not yet all had succeeded to take their hot slops, when the room supervisor with his stick emptied the room, which must have been tidied up before the roll-call. In the meantime, our straw mattresses and blankets were arranged, in accordance with a fashion which prevailed in that block, as blocks competed with each other in arrangement of that “beddings” of ours. Additionally, the floor had to be washed up.

The gong for the evening roll-call used to sound at 5:45. At 6:00 all of us stood in dressed ranks (each block drawn up in ten ranks, to make the calculation easier). All had to be present on the roll-call. When it happened that somebody was missing – not because he had escaped, but e.g. some novice naively had hidden, or he had just overslept and the roll-call did not correspond to the number of the camp – then he was searched, found, dragged to the square and nearly always killed in public. Sometimes that missing was a prisoner, who had hanged himself somewhere in the garret, or was just “going to the wires” during the roll-call – then shots of a guard in a tower resounded and the prisoner fell transfixed by bullets. Prisoners used to “go to the wires” mostly in the evening – before a new day of their torments. Before the night, a several-hours break in anguishes, it occurred rarely. There was an official order, forbidding colleagues to prevent suicides. A prisoner caught “preventing” went to the “bunker” for punishment.

5

CAMP AUTHORITIES

All authorities inside the camp were composed exclusively of prisoners. Initially of Germans, later, of prisoners of other nationalities began to clamber up to those posts. The block supervisor (red band with white inscription "Blockältester", on his right arm) used to do away prisoners in his blocks by rigour and by stick. He was responsible for the block, but he had nothing in common with prisoner's work. On the other hand, a capo did for prisoners in his "commando" by work and by stick, and he was responsible for the work of his commando.

The highest authority in the camp was senior of the camp ("Lagerältester"). Initially, there were two of them: "Bruno" and "Leo" – prisoners. Two cads, before whom everybody trembled with fear. They used to murder in full view of all prisoners, sometimes by one blow of a stick or fist. True name of the former – Bronisław Brodniewicz, of the latter – Leon Wiczorek, two ex-Poles in German service... Dressed differently from the others, in long boots, navy-blue trousers, short overcoats and berets, black band with white inscription on left arm, they created a dark pair, they often used to go together.

Yet not all those authorities inside the camp, recruited out of "people from behind the wires" swept dust before every SS-man, they answered his questions not before they had taken their caps off, while standing at attention... What a mere nothing an ordinary

prisoner was... Authorities of superior men in military uniforms, the SS-men, lived outside the wires, in barracks and in the town.

6

ORDER OF THE DAY. EVERYDAY ATROCITIES. WORK. ERECTION OF THE CREMATORIUM

I revert to the order of the day in the camp.

The roll-call. We stood in ranks dressed by stick and as straight as a wall (after all, I hankered after the well-dressed Polish ranks since the time of the war of 1939). Vis-a-vis to us a macabre view: ranks of block 13 (old numbering) – SK (“Straf-Kompanie”) stood, being dressed by block supervisor Ernst Krankemann using his radical method – just his knife. In that time all Jews, priests and some Poles with proven cases went into the SK. Krankemann was in duty to do away the prisoners assigned to him nearly every day, as quickly as possible; this duty corresponded to the nature of that man. If anybody inconsiderately pushed forward for several centimetres, Krankemann stabbed him with his knife he wore in his sleeve. Whoever by excessive caution pushed back a bit too much, he received, from the butcher running along the ranks, a stab in his kidneys. The view of a falling man, kicking or groaning, made Krankemann mad. He jumped upon his chest, kicked his kidneys, sexual organs, did him away as quickly as he could. Upon that view he got pervaded as by electric current.

Then, among Poles standing arm in arm, one thought was felt, we were all united by our rage, our desire of revenge. Now I felt myself to be in an environment perfectly ready to start my job, and I discovered in me a substitute of joy... In a while I was terrified if I was sane – joy here – this was probably insane... After all I

felt joy – first of all for that reason I wanted to start my job, so I did not get in despair. That was a moment of a radical turn in my mental life. In an illness it would be called: the crisis had happily gone.

For the time being, you had to fight with great effort for survival.

A gong after a roll-call meant: “Arbeitskommando formieren!” Upon such signal all rushed to some commandos i.e. to those work groups, which appeared to be better ones. In that times there was still some chaos regarding assignments (not like later, when everybody went quietly to that commando, to which he had been assigned as a number). Prisoners were rushing in various directions, their ways crossing, of which capos, block supervisors and SS-men made use by beating the running or overturning people with their sticks, tripping them up, pushing, kicking them in most sensitive places.

Evicted to the camp area by Alois, I worked by a wheel-barrow, transporting gravel. Simply, as I did not know where to stand and had no favoured commando, I took place in one of the fives of some hundred, which was taken to that work. Mainly colleagues from Warsaw worked here. “Numbers” older than we, that is those who had been imprisoned longer than us, those who had managed to survive so far – they had already taken more convenient “positions”. We – from Warsaw – were done for in mass by various kinds of work, sometimes by transporting gravel from one pit being dug into another one, to fill it up, and vice versa. I happened to be placed among those, who transported gravel necessary to complete the construction of a crematorium.

We were building the crematorium for ourselves. Scaffolding around the chimney was rising up higher and higher. With your wheel barrow, filled by “vorarbeiters” – lickspittles relentless for us, you had to move quickly and, while upon the wooden boards farther off, to push the wheel-barrow running. Every 15-20 steps there stood a capo with a stick and – while thrashing the running

prisoners – shouted “Laufschritt!” Uphill you pushed your wheel-barrow slowly. With an empty wheel-barrow, the “Laufschritt” was obligatory along the whole route. Here, your muscles, skill and eyes competed in your struggle for life. You should have had much strength to push the wheel-barrow, you ought to have known how to keep it on the wooden board, you should have seen and picked out the right moment to pause your work to take breath into your tired lungs. It was here where I saw how many of us – of educated people – were unable to get along in the heavy, ruthless conditions. Yes, then we underwent a hard selection.

Sport and gymnastics I had exercised previously, were of great use for me. An educated man, who was looking around helplessly and seeking indulgence or aid from anybody, as if requesting it for that reason he was a barrister or an engineer, always faced a tough stick. Here some learned and pot-bellied barrister or landlord pushed his wheel-barrow so incompetently, it fell down from the board into the sand and he was unable to lift it up. There a helpless professor in spectacles or an older gentleman presented another kind of a lamentable view. All those who were not fit for that work or exhausted their strength when running with the wheel-barrow, were beaten, and in case of a tumble – were killed by a stick or boot. It was in such moments of killing another prisoner when you, like a real animal, stood for several minutes, took breath into your widely moving lungs, somewhat balanced the pace of your thumping heart.

A gong for dinner, welcomed with joy by everybody, sounded then in the camp at 11:20. Between 11:30 and 12:00 the noon roll-call was held – in most cases quite quickly. Since 12:00 until 13:00 there was time assigned for dinner. After dinner a gong summoned again to “Arbeitskommando” and the torments were continued until a gong for the evening roll-call.

On the third day of my work “on the wheel barrow”, after dinner, it seemed to me I would not be able to live up until the gong. I was already very tired and I understood that when those weaker

than me to be killed ran short, then my turn would come. Bloody Alois, whom our work in blocks suited in respect of order and tidiness, after the three penal days in the camp, condescendingly accepted us to the block again, saying: “Now you know what the work in the camp means – »Paßt auf!« your work in block, that I would not evict you to the camp for ever”.

In respect of me, he soon put his threat into effect. I did not apply the methods required by him and suggested by Kazik, and I got fired crashing out of the block, which I will describe below.

BEGINNING OF THE CONSPIRACY ORGANISATION

Now I would like to write about the beginning of the job set on foot by me. In that time the basic task was to establish a military organisation, in order to keep up the spirits of my colleagues, by the delivery and dissemination of news from the outside, by the organisation – to the best of our ability – an additional food and distribution of underwear among those organised, transmission of news to the outside and, as the crown of that all – the preparation of our units to seize the camp, when it became the order of the day, when an order to drop weapons or to land troops was given.

I commenced my job like in 1939 in Warsaw, even with some people whom I had recruited to the Secret Polish Army in Warsaw before. I organised here the first “five”, to which I swore colonel 1, captain doctor 2, captain of horse 3, second lieutenant 4 and colleague 5 (the key table with corresponding names I will write separately). The commander of the five was colonel 1, doctor 2 was received an order to take the control of the situation in the prisoner hospital (Häftlingskrankenbau – HKB), where he worked as a “fleger” (officially, Poles had no right to be doctors, they were allowed to work as hospital orderlies only).

In November I sent my first report to the Headquarters in Warsaw, by second lieutenant 6 (until the Uprising he lived in

Warsaw in Raszyńska 58 street), officer of our intelligence service, bribed out of Oświęcim.

Colonel 1 extended our action on the area of the construction office ("Baubüro").

In future I organised next four "fives". Each of those fives did not know of the existence of other fives, it deemed itself to be the top of the organisation and was developing as widely as the sum of skills and energy of its members allowed. I did so out of caution, so that a possible give-away of one five would not entail a neighbouring five. In future, the fives in wide development became to touch one another and feel each other's presence mutually. Then some colleagues would come to me with the report: "You know, some other organisation is hiding here." I reassured them that they should not have been interested in it.

But this is the future. For the time being, there was one five only.

“BLOODY ALOIS”

In the meantime, on some day in the block, in the evening after the roll-call, I went to report to Alois there were three sick persons in the room, who could go to work (they were nearly done away). Bloody Alois went mad and cried: “What, a sick one here in my block?!... no sick ones!... all must work and so must you! Enough of that!...” and he dashed after me with his stick to the hall: “Where are?!...”

Two of them were lying by the wall, panting for breath, the third of them knelt in the corner of the hall and was praying.

— Was macht er?! – he cried to me.

— Er betet.

— Betet?!... Who taught him it?!...

— Das weiß ich nicht – I replied.

He jumped to the praying man and began to revile upon his head and shout he was an idiot, that there was no God, it was he who gave him bread and not God... but he did not strike him. Then he ran to those two by the wall and started to kick them in kidneys and other places, while shouting: “auf!!!... auf!!!...” until those two, seeing death before their eyes, rose up by the remainder of their strength. Then he started crying to me: “You can see! I told you they were not ill! They can walk, they can work! Weg! March off to your work! And you with them!” In this way he evicted me to work in the camp. But that one who was praying,

he took to the hospital personally. A strange man he was – that communist.

TORTURE: “GYMNASTICS”, “DEATH WHEEL”, ETC.

On the square I found myself in a suspicious situation. All stood in work commandos already, waiting for march-out. To run to stand up in the ranks as a late prisoner meant to expose oneself to beating and kicking by capos and SS-men. I saw a unit of prisoners stand in the square, who were not included in the work commandos. In that period a part of prisoners who were excessive at work (there were few commandos, the camp was only beginning to develop) “did gymnastics” in the square. Temporarily, near them there were no capos or SS-men, as they were busy in the arrangement of work groups. I ran up to them and stood in their circle “for gymnastics”.

In the past I liked gymnastics, but from the time of Oświęcim my attraction to it has somewhat faded away. Since 6:00 in the evening, we stood sometimes for several hours and were terribly frozen. Without caps and socks, in thin denims, in that sub-mountain climate of autumn 1940, in the evening nearly always in fog, we shivered with cold. Our legs and hands often protruded out of shortish trousers and sleeves. We were not touched. We had to stand and freeze. The cold put the doing away of us into effect. Capos and block supervisors passing by (often Alois) stopped, laughed and with meaningful movements of their hands, to symbolise volatilization, said: “...und das Leben fliiiiieegt...Ha! Ha!”

When the fog dispersed, the sun flashed and it became a little warmer, while there remained – as it seemed – little time to dinner, then a heard of capos commenced “gymnastics” with us – one could safely call it a heavy penal exercises. There was too much time until dinner for such kind of gymnastics.

— Hüpfen!

— Rollen!

— Tanzen!

— Kniebeugen!

One of that – “hüpfen” – was sufficient to be done away. It was impossible to perform “breast stroke” round the huge square – not only because your bare foots got the skin torn off on the gravel till blood was drawn, but because no muscles were sufficient for such effort. My sport work-out of previous years rescued me here. Here again the weak pot-bellied educated men were done for, those who were incapable of “breast stroke” even on a short distance. Here again the stick would fall on the heads of those who would tumble down each several steps. Again a relentless turn of doing people away... And again, like an animal, you snapped an opportunity and took breath in the moment when the heard of stick-men were besetting their some new victim.

After dinner – a next turn. Until the evening many dead and nearly-dead bodies, who quickly passed away in hospital, were dragged off.

Just next to us, two rollers were “working”. Supposedly, the aim was to level the ground. Yet they were working to do away the people, who were pulling them. Priests with addition of several other Polish prisoners up to the number 20-25, were yoked to it. In the second, larger one about 50 Jews were yoked. Krankenmann and another capo stood on the shafts and, by their body weight, increased the burden of the shaft, to press it down into the shoulders and necks of prisoners who were pulling the rolls. From time to time, the capo or Krankenmann with philosophical tranquillity let down his stick on somebody’s head, struck one

prisoner or another, who was used as a beast of draught, with such strength that sometimes killed him at once or pushed him fainted under the roll, while beating the rest of prisoners to prevent them from stopping. From that small factory of dead bodies, many people were dragged off by their legs and laid in a row – to be counted during the roll-call.

At nightfall Krankenmann, walking about the square, his hands behind his back, contemplated, with smile of satisfaction, those former prisoners lying already in peace.

For two days I exercised the “gymnastics” called the “death wheel”. On the third day in the morning, while standing in the wheel, I wondered what percentage of the remained trainees is weaker physically and less athletic-trained than me, and calculated for how long I could rely on my own strength, when suddenly my situation was changed suddenly.

10

STOVE-MAKER'S WORK. PRIVATE LIFE OF AN SS-MAN. CONTRAST OF THE WORLDS

Commandos were marching off to work. Part of them to work within the wires, while another part marched outside (to work outside the gate or fence).

Next to the gate the commander of the camp ("Lagerführer") stood behind his desk, with a group of SS-men. He was inspecting the departing commandos, checking the quantities against those specified in the register. Just next to him there stood the "Arbeitsdienst" – Otto (a German who never struck any Pole). By virtue of his position he assigned work for individual prisoners. He was responsible for manning of individual commandos by workers.

While standing on the bend of the wheel near the gates I noticed Otto rushing just towards us. I instinctively moved closer. The "Arbeitsdienst", anxious, came running just on me.

- Vielleicht bist du ein Ofensetzer?
- Jawohl! Ich bin ein Ofensetzer. – I replied off-hand.
- Aber ein guter Meister?
- Gewiß, ein guter Meister.
- Also, schnell...

He ordered me to take four more people from the wheel and to rush at full gallop after him to the gate at block 9 (old numbering); pails, trowels, brick hammers, lime were given to us and all our five stood in a line before the desk of the chief of the camp, who

was then Karl Fritzsich. I looked at the faces of my new chance companions. I knew none of them.

— Fünf Ofensetzer – Otto reported loudly, panting.

They gave us two guarding soldiers and we marched off outside the gate in the direction of the town. It turned out, that Otto was obliged to prepare several master craftsmen to move stoves in the rooms of an SS-man, he had forgotten and, in the last moment, in order to save the situation, in the time when the previous commando was being counted in the gate, he composed the team of our five. Then we were carried to the flat of the SS-man.

In one of the small houses in the town, the owner of the flat, an SS-man spoke German, but in a human tone, what seemed strange to me. He asked who was the main master and explain to me he liquidated his kitchen, that his wife would arrive, so he wanted to move the kitchen plate here, while the small stove into that room. He thought there were too many of us, but the point was first of all in that the work should be done well, so we all may work here and if some of us had nothing to do, they should tidy the garret. He would come here every day to check our work. And he went off.

I checked if some of my colleagues knew stoves, when it turned out that no one did, I sent my four to carry water, to dig clay, to temper etc. Two SS-men guarded us outside the house. I left alone. What did I do with the stove? – it does not matter. A man in his struggle for life is able to do more than he had thought before. I disassembled carefully, not to break the tiles, I carefully examined how the chimney flues were running and where and how they were vaulted. Then I put up the kitchen stove and the small stove in the places indicated to me.

I constructed all that in four days. But when on the fifth day it was necessary to go and make a test fire in the stove, I got lost in the camp so happily that although I heard that an ofensetzer master was being searched throughout the camp, I was not found. No one guessed to search among gardeners in the garden of the

commander... The numbers of our five had not been recorded anywhere also. In those times even capos of commandos not always recorded numbers. Also, I never got to know if the stoves worked well or smoked.

I revert to the moment, when I was in the town in the flat of the SS-man for the first time. To be sure, I shall write of bare facts only... I had already seen terrible pictures in Oświęcim – nothing could break me. Though here, where I was not endangered by any stick or kick I felt I had my heart in my mouth and it was as heavy as never before...

What I mention here were indisputable facts. But this is a fact from my hart and perhaps due to that it is not quite a bare fact.

How's that? – so, there is still the world and people live as before? Here some homes, gardens, flowers and children. Merry voices. Plays. There – hell, murder, cancellation of everything human, everything good... There the SS-man is a butcher, torturer, here – he pretends to be a man.

So, where is the truth? There? Or here?

In the home he puts up his nest. His wife will arrive, so there is some feeling in him. Church bells – people prey, love, they are born, while just next to them – tortures, murders...

Then some mutiny arose in me. There were moments of a heavy contest. Then, for four days, on my way to work by the stoves I saw heaven and hell by turns. I felt as if I was pushed into a fire and into water alternately. That's true! I was hardened then.

In the meantime our first “five” did “several steps” forward, several new members were sworn. One of them was captain “Y”. His first name was Michał. Captain Michał tackled his business in such way that he helped in the morning to arrange fives for work. In the presence of capos he used to rail at colleagues and grumble; while dressing the ranks he spared capo's stick to many prisoners, he alone made much bustle and noise while winking to our companions when capo stood turned back to them. Capos decided he was fitted for a “chief of twenty” and committed him

four “fives”, making him a “Vorarbeiter”. It was Michał who rescued me on the critical day, when I had to disappear somewhere from the sight of capos. He pushed me into the twenty of a friend sub-capo, in one of commandos marching off through the gate to work.

I happened to be in a unit working in the fields, just next the villa of the commander of the camp. In the meantime the “Of-fensetzer” was being searched in the camp, until Otto found another prisoner and the five went to the stoves as usually. It was raining all the day. Working in the field, from which we were making, in quick pace, a garden for the commander, we were getting wet – it seemed – deep into our bodies, it also seemed that the wind was penetrating us right through. We were drenched to the skin. The wind turned us about for a long time (it was impossible to keep standing one side towards the wind), froze the blood in our veins and only our work, quick work with the spade, generated some heat from the stock of our energy. But the energy had to be managed economically, as its regeneration was very doubtful... We were ordered to take off our denims. In shirts, barefoot, in clogs getting stuck in mud, without caps, water streaming down from our heads when the rain stopped, we were vaporising like horses after a race.

WEATHER CONDITIONS. "JOB UNDER THE ROOF"

The year 1940, especially its autumn, made a nuisance to prisoners of Oświęcim by continuous rains, first of all during roll-calls. Roll-calls with rain became a chronic occurrence, even on days which could be numbered among fine ones. Everybody was getting wet during a roll-call – those who worked all day in the field and those who worked all day under the roof. First of all, "old numbers" that is those ones who had arrived two or three months before us, had managed to get a job under the roof. Those months made also a huge difference "in positions" (as all ones under the roof were staffed. In general, a prisoner who arrived a month later, differed from his colleagues not in that he was here shorter, but in that did not experience such anguishes which had been applied a month before. Nevertheless, methods were changed constantly and the whole pleiad of supervisors, beaters and other fellows of the deepest dye, who wanted to endear themselves to the authorities, had always a sufficient number of them.

12

“THE CAMP WAS A GAUGE WHICH TESTED HUMAN CHARACTERS”

It was likewise also in subsequent years. But for the time being, nobody thought of years. “Kazik” (in block 17) told us some time that the first year was worst to be survived. Some laughed heartily. A year? On Christmas Eve we will be at home! Germans will not sustain. England... etc. (Sławek Szpakowski). Others were seized by horror. A year? Who would sustain a year here, where you were playing blindman’s-buff with death each day... maybe today... maybe tomorrow... And when a day seemed sometimes to be a year. And, oddly, a day dragged on to infinity. Sometimes, when strength was missing to do a work, which must have been done – an hour seemed to be a century, whereas weeks were passing quickly. It was odd but it was – it seemed sometimes that it was already something wrong with the time or with our senses.

But our senses were not like with other people... like with people over there far away. This was certain.

...That is – when after heavy experiences we got closer to each other, and our trials tightened the bonds of our friendship more than it was the case over there on the Earth... when you had your “pack” in which people supported and rescued each other, many a time risking their own lives... when suddenly under your eyes, your brother, your friend was killed, murdered in the most horrible way – then only one thought came to you! To attack the butcher and to die together... It occurred several times, but it

always brought about one more death only... No, it was not the solution! In that way we would die too fast...

Then, you saw a prolonged agony of your friend and, so to say, you were dying with him together.... you ceased your existence together with him... yet you got revived, regenerated, transformed. But if it happens not once but, let us say, ninety times – it cannot be helped, you become someone else than you were on the Earth... Thousands of us were dying there... tens of thousands... and finally – hundreds of thousands... So, the Earth and people on it, busy with matters so trifling in our eyes, seemed funny. Thus we were re-forged inwardly.

But not everyone. The camp was a gauge, which tested human characters. Some of us slide into a moral sewer. Others got their characters cut like crystal. We were cut by sharp tools. Blows painfully cut into our bodies, but in our souls they found a field to be ploughed. All of us went through such a transformation. Like the ploughed soil is put aside to the right, into a fertile furrow – on the left side it still remains to be ploughed in the next cut. Sometimes the plough jumped up on a stone and left a section of soil not processed, barren.... A waste land.

All titles, distinctions, diplomas fell off from us – they remained far away, on Earth... When looking as if from the other world at our profiles dressed in those earthly accretions, you saw all our pack in the past: this one with such a title, that one with another, but you were unable to look at that otherwise than with a smile of forgiveness.... We already addressed each other by our given names. By “Mister” we addressed only “zugangs”, as they did not yet understand it. Among us it an offensive word as a rule: Colonel R., whom, by a lapse of my memory, I addressed “Mister Colonel”, miffed at me “I wish you’d stop that...”

How different it is on the Earth. A Ted or a Tom boasts among his colleagues of his privilege to address by bare “you” some person two ranks higher. All that vanished completely here. We

became a bare value. A man could be as much important, as high his value was...

13

WORK IN THE FIELDS. DESTRUCTION OF VILLAGES AROUND THE CAMP AND EXPULSION OF THEIR INHABITANTS

I worked in the commander's garden for two days. We levelled the ground, marked out lawns, alleys. We removed soil from alleys, dug deeply in the ground. We filled the hollows with thickly strewn, crushed brick. We demolished several small houses in the neighbourhood. In general, all houses near the camp, especially in the zone of "kleine Postenkette" (the small guarding chain), that is inside a ring of several kilometres in its diameter, had to be demolished. German supervisors attacked with special doggedness those buildings, erected here by the Polish population. Rich villas and small, but neat houses, for the construction of which some Polish worker had been saving for all his life perhaps, were disappearing, demolished by prisoners – Poles, driven by sticks, beaten, kicked and insulted by various kinds of "verflucht". During the whole time of those work there was a continuous opportunity for such persecution.

Having ripped off the roofs, pulled down the walls, the most difficult work was to demolish the foundations, which had to disappear without trace. Pits were filled up and the householder, if he returned, would have to seek for a long time the place in which his family nest had been placed before. We dug out some trees also. Nothing was left of a whole homestead.

During the destruction of one of such homesteads, I noticed a picture of the Holy Virgin, suspended on a bush, which, as it seemed to me, stuck lonely here and remained whole among all that chaos and destruction. Our men did not want to remove it. In the understanding of capos, when exposed to rain, snow and frost, it would be subject to ill-treatment here. So, much later on a snow-covered bush there could be seen a picture covered by hoarfrost, glittering with its gilding, showing though a misted glass the face and eyes only, which, for prisoners driven here in winter to work, among wild shouts and kicks, was a nice phenomenon, to direct their thoughts to their family homes, of one of them – to his wife, another one – to his mother.

Wet through during our work, wet through during roll-calls, we used to put our wet denims for the night upon our heads in place of pillows. In the evening we put on such clothes and went barefoot, in clogs slipping off, without caps, again in rain or penetrating wind. It was November already. Sometimes it was snowing. Colleagues were being done away. They would go to the hospital and return no more. Strange – I was not a Hercules, but I did not even catch a cold.

After several days of my work in the garden, Michal put me into a twenty, which he was able to select. So he selected it mainly of colleagues already sworn or such ones whose recruitment into our organisation could be expected – of valuable people, who should have been rescued. Our twenty belonged to a hundred, which together with a dozen or so of other hundreds would go to the “Industriehof II”. Capos raged there: “August the Black”, Sigurd, Bonitz, “August the White” and others. Among them there were a dozen of “pups” – of “volksdeutsche” in German service, which had a joy in beating prisoners in their faces, beating with stick, etc. One of them got out in his reckoning a bit and after several days was found hanged in one of huts, he must have hanged himself, nobody rescued him – such was an explicit order in the camp.

Michał as a “Vorarbeiter”, with his twenty, got an assignment to demolish one of the small houses in the field. He led all of us there and we were “working hard” there for several weeks. We were sitting among the corners of the foundation of the house and resting after our work, sometimes we knocked our pick axes so that sounds of any work could be heard. From time to time several colleagues carried away, in a hand-barrow, the rubble into which the walls and foundations of our demolished house were turned. The rubble material was used for construction of an alley, at the distance of several hundred meters from us. Nobody of our authorities deigned to drop in to that house, located far away from work area of the remaining hundreds. Capos had so much work upon doing away a dozen hundred of “Polish rabid curs”, that they did not remember us, or they did not want to bother themselves to walk through a muddy field. Michał stood on the guard and was observing diligently. If an SS-man or capo was in a close distance, then immediately a pair of colleagues with hand-barrow set off, pick-axes were striking more briskly the cement of the foundation and vaults of the basement.

On my work I stood next to Sławek Szpakowski. Our conversation covered mainly subjects of cooking. We both were optimists. We came to a conclusion we had nearly identical tastes of cooking. So, Sławek planned a menu, with which he would entertain me in Warsaw, upon our return from the camp. From time to time, when hunger annoyed us and rain poured down our backs, we took up our work seriously, splitting off large blocks of concrete.

In our striped clothes, with pick-axes and hammers, we made a view, to which you could supplement by singing the verse: “... hammering ore in mines” and Sławek promised to paint – after our release from this hell -a portrait of me in the striped dress, with a pick-axe. Our spirit was kept up by optimism only, as the rest – all the reality – was very black. We were famished. Ah, if we had that bread, which we placed into wheel-barrow in the

square, on the day of our arrival to the camp. In that time we had not yet learn to value bread.

RAW CABBAGE AND MAGEL-WURZEL AS FOOD. DYSENTERY

In the vicinity of our work, behind the wires placed along the line of the “great guarding chain” two goats and a cow were grazing, eating with appetite cabbage leaves, which grew on the other side of the wires. On our side there were no cabbage laves, all of them had been eaten. Not by cows, but by creatures similar to people – by prisoners – by us. We ate raw cabbage and raw mangel-wurzel. We were jealous of cows – mangel-wurzel was not bad to them. A huge part of us suffered from stomach. Among prisoners, “Durchfall”, that is dysentery, seized an ever-growing mass of people and was rife in the camp.

I somehow had no stomach complaint. A prosaic matter – a sound stomach was an important thing in the camp. Whoever fell ill, he had to have much strong will to restrain from eating, at least for a short period, at all. Any special diet was out of question. It could be applied in the hospital, but initially it was difficult to get there and to return. You could leave the hospital rather through the crematorium chimney. Strength of will, so much valuable, was not sufficient in such case. Even if a prisoner controlled himself and resigned his dinner, dried his bread for the next day or burnt it into carbon and ate it to stop the dysentery, he was anyway weakened by his continuously disordered stomach, while during the work of his commando, under an eye of his stick-armed butcher, due to his insufficient strength at work he

“got into bad books” as “ein fauler Hund” and was done away by beating.

15

WORK IN THE FIELDS. TWO-TON CONSTRUCTION BEAMS CARRIED BY HANDS

On our return to the camp for the midday and for the evening roll-call, that is twice a day, we all had to carry bricks. For the initial two days we carried 7 bricks each of us, then for several days – 6 bricks, while in the end the standard of 5 became fixed. In the camp, when we arrived, six multi-storey and fourteen one-story blocks were fenced by wire. Eight new multi-storey blocks were under construction in the roll-call square, while all one-storey blocks were being raised up to multi-storey ones. The material (bricks, iron, lime) was carried by us to the camp from a distance of several kilometres and before the structures were ended, also many prisoners had ended their lives.

Work in Michał's twenty saved my colleagues much their strength. Kind-hearted Michał standing on the guard of our safety, outside the small house, got a cold, got pneumonia and got to the hospital. He died in December. When he left us as he went off to the HKB (it was still the end of November) our noses were put into the grindstone as was the case in all remaining twenties and hundreds.

A full-scale murder was commenced again. We unloaded railway vans rolled into side-tracks. Iron, glass, brick, pipes, drains. All materials necessary for an expansion of the camp were delivered. Vans had to be unloaded quickly. So, we made haste, carried, tumbled and fell down. Sometimes, the load of a two-ton

beam or rail squeezed us. Even those who did not fall, exhausted their reserve of strength, accumulated somewhere in the past. It was more and more a surprise for them that they were still alive, they still could walk, when long before they had crossed the limit of what a man was able to withstand. Yes, on one hand some great contempt was born for those, who due to their body had to be numbered into people, but also an acknowledgement was born for the strange human nature, so strong in spirit that – as it seemed – it included something of immortality.

BOTH DEAD AND ALIVE MUST BE PRESENT ON
ROLL-CALLS. INSUFFICIENT FOOD

To be sure, tens of dead bodies denied that. We four dragged one, while going for the roll-call to the camp. Cold legs and hands, by which we held the dead bodies, bones clothed with livid skin. Now indifferent eyes looked out of livid-grey-violet faces with traces of beating. Some corpses, not yet cooled, their heads broken to pieces by a spade, were swinging in time with the march of the column, which had to keep pace.

Our food, sufficient to vegetate in idleness, was by far insufficient to preserve energy in hard work. The more so, that this energy had to heat one's body, chilled during outdoor work.

In the "Industriehof II", when we lost Michał, we put our wits in motion and manoeuvred smartly between sticks, so that we could work in a bearable group. One time, unloading railway vans, another time in a "Straßenbau" commando with "August the White".

On our way to work in that commando, when it happened we were passing a warehouse, our sense of smell was struck by pork-butcher's products. That sense, sharpened by hunger, was amazingly sensitive then. In our imagination, rows of suspended hams, smoked bacon, fillets, passed smartly. But – it's not for us! The stock was surely for the "superior men". Anyway – as we made jokes – that sense of smell was a proof that we were people no longer. We were about 40 meters from the warehouse, so it was

rather a sense of smell of an animal and not of a man... One thing was always a helped us – our good humour.

Nevertheless those conditions altogether began for good to do for us. When I carried bricks to the camp, especially in the evening, I walked with steady gait – but outwardly only. In fact, I sometimes lost my conscious and made several steps quite mechanically, as if sleeping, I was somewhere far away from that place... everything went green before my eyes. I very nearly got stumbled... When my mind commenced again to operate and record my mental state – I woke up... I was penetrated by the command: No! You must not give up! And I continued to walk, driven by my will only... The state of passion was slowly passing away...I entered the camp through the gate. Yes, now I got to understand the inscription over the gate: “Arbeit macht frei” ! Oh, yes, really... work makes free... liberates from the camp... from my consciousness, as I had experienced just a while before. It liberates the spirit from the body while directing that body into crematorium... Yet something should be invented... should be done to stop that process of loss of strength.

“WELL, TOMASZ, HOW DO YOU FEEL?”

When I met Władek (colonel 1 and doctor 2), Władek 2 always asked: “Well, Tomasz, how do you feel?” I used to answer, with a good-humoured look, that I felt well. In the beginning they were amazed, later they got accustomed and finally they believed that I felt excellently. I could not answer otherwise. As I wanted to conduct my “job” – despite that my colleagues set about that seriously, and one of them managed to consolidate his position in the hospital, where he began to be of some importance, while another one was expanding his five in the construction office – I still had to suggest that even here our job was quite possible, and to fight a psychosis which no 3 was beginning to suffer. What if I complained that I felt bad or that I was weak and, in fact, so pressed by my work that I sought a solution for myself, to save my own life... Surely, in such case I would not be able to suggest anything to others, neither to require anything from anybody... So I felt well – for the time being, only for others – and then, which I will describe below, things came to such a point that despite continuous dangers and strained nerves, I became to feel well actually and not only in my words addressed to others.

In some measure, a division took place. When the body was continuously in anguish, spiritually you felt sometimes – not to exaggerate – wonderfully. Pleasure began to get nested somewhere in your brain, both due to spiritual experiences and due to the interesting game, purely intellectual, which I was playing. But

first of all you ought to save your body from being killed. To get under some roof to avoid being done away by horrible outdoor weather conditions.

IN THE WOODWORK SHOP

Sławek's dream was to be accepted to the sculpture studio of the woodwork shop. He intended to try to bring me there afterwards. There were two woodwork shops in the camp already. A large one in the "Industriehof I", and a small one right in the in block 9 (old numbering). My colleague from my work in Warsaw, captain 3 whose name was Fred, had already contrived to get there. Upon my question he informed me that maybe I would get there if I could persuade the Vorarbeiter of the woodwork shop in some way. He was a volksdeutsch – Wilhelm Westrych – from Pyry near Warsaw. He was here for illegal trade of foreign currency and he expected to be released soon. Westrych, although a volksdeutsch, served two masters. While working for Germans, he sometimes rescued Poles, if he felt it might be of some benefit in future. He willingly rescued some former prominent persons, so that later, when Germany lost the war, in order to whitewash those years of collaboration – to adduce the rescue of a prominent person by him. Then I decided to play vabanque.

My colleague, captain 8, promised to dispose well our Vorarbeiter and to take him in the evening before block 8 (old numbering) where he lived. Here our conversation took place. I told him briefly that it was no wonder he did not remember me, as who could have heard of Tomasz.... Here I mentioned my "camp" second name.

“Well, I am here under a false name”. Here, the Parks took the thread of my life in their scissors – I thought after Sienkiewicz. I was risking my life. It was enough that the Vorarbeiter could make a report or confession to someone of the herd of SS-men and capos, in which he used to mingle, that there was somebody with a false name and I would come to my end. I will not describe how I enticed Westrych in our further conversation. I succeeded. He began to address me by “Mister”, which had no offensive flavour in the mouths of a Vorarbeiter addressing an ordinary prisoner, just on the contrary. He told me he must have seen my face somewhere... maybe on some pictures of receptions in the Warsaw Castle and – what was most important – he told me he always rescued honest Poles and he himself, as a matter of fact, felt to be a Pole, so I should come to the (small) woodwork shop on the next day and he would settle the matter personally with capo. I would be accepted to the woodwork shop for sure and he presumed I would appreciate it in future... The conversation took place on 7 December in the evening.

On the next day, 8 December, after the roll-call I got to the woodwork shop. Until then, when I worked in the field, I wore no cap or socks. Here, under roof, in warmth, what an irony, I received socks from Westrych on 8 December and a week afterwards – a cap. He introduced me to the capo of the woodwork shop as a good carpenter (poor ones were not taken at all), who nevertheless should be taken for a trial time. Capo looked at me and nodded his consent.

My workday passed in quite different conditions. Here it was warm and dry and the work was clean. Punishment here was not beating, but the mere fact of removal from such a place – the expulsion from the woodwork shop into the nightmare of the camp again. Nevertheless one had to know something in order to work here. I was not short of abilities in my life – but unfortunately – I had no knowledge of carpentry. I stood by the workbench of a good carpenter, later a member of our organisation, corporal 9

(his name was Czesiek). I followed him and under his direction I trained my hand in movements typical of an actual carpenter. Capo was present in the shop and knew the work. So all movements should be followed in a professional way.

Initially, I did nothing valuable. I shaved planks or sawed together with Czesiek, who declared I did fairly well for the first time. Next day, capo gave me an individual work. Here I had to produce some effect. Fortunately, it was not difficult and with the help of Czesiek I succeeded quite well. On that day we also pushed Sławek into the shop, as capo was just seeking a sculptor and I together with one colleague mentioned him. After several days capo gave Czesiek a new work. Assigned to his workbench, I helped him in his work according to his instructions. He was quite satisfied with me. But the capo himself was not satisfied with the way Czesiek had solved his carpentry task and we both got fired crashing out of the woodwork shop. Czesiek – the master, and I – his assistant.

“... and it so happened that... so a good carpenter, but made a mistake in zincs” – our case was told about by carpenters. Czesiek did not make any mistake in “zincs” but understood that the capo did not want to have them with the ordered product. Anyway – our case was a hard one. For an infringement in our work we were fired into the camp for a punitive work by wheel-barrows, at the disposal of senior of the camp.

That wheel-barrow day began for us from a heavy morning. “Bruno” and Lagerkapo (a capo assigned to keep order in the camp) had no indulgence for us. It was huge frost, but the Laufschrift did not allow us to feel any cold. But it was worse with our strength. Czesiek, who had worked for a longer time in the woodwork shop, had gathered more strength. My reinforcement was several days of rest spent in warmth, by which I had gathered some strength. But we had been in the camp not for one day. Czesiek contrived to get off as early as in the forenoon, I – in the afternoon, and we hid ourselves, each of us in another block. We began to have

some connections in the camp, which a Zugang could not afford to do without the risk of beating. That day passed somehow, but what next?

Czesiek did not return to the small woodwork shop. I met him later in another place. But Westrych took care of me seriously... He informed me through Fred (captain 8) that I should come to the shop in the evening after the roll-call. There on the next day he explained to capo that I had only executed what Czesiek ordered me to do, that I was a tolerably good carpenter and capo agreed that I would continue my work. In order not to get into capo's bad books again, Westrych devised a carpenter work for me outside the shop. Here, capo used to look at carpenters' hands and movements, so Westrych led me to block 5 (old numbering) and put me in charge of block supervisor Baltosiński, telling him I could do boot wipers, coal box, repair the window frame and do similar small work, for which no extraordinary carpenter was needed. Additionally, he instructed Baltosiński (I got to know it later from Jurek 10) to take care of me and give me additional food, because it could be useful in future as I was not a first comer.

CARPENTER'S WORK IN BLOCK 5

In block 5 I worked in room no 2, which supervisor was Stasiak Polkowski of Warsaw (hairdresser). I made the above mentioned articles in this block. I repaired or produced new cabinets for room supervisors, out of parts of old cabinets carried from the woodwork shop. I received additional food in the rooms. Baltosiński would send me a bowlful of "second" soup – I began to regenerate my strength. So I worked all December and the beginning of January 1941, until the incident with Leo, which I will describe below.

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“THE BESTIALITY OF GERMAN BUTCHERS”. FIRST ESCAPES. “STANDING AT ATTENTION”. BARBED WIRE FENCES

The year 1940 ended. Before I pass on to the year 1941 in Oświęcim, I would like to add some camp pictures, which belong to 1940.

The bestiality of German butchers, which emphasized in a degenerated way some instincts of juveniles, criminals, formerly – some teen-age prisoners of German concentration camps, at present – those who formed our authority in Oświęcim, was shown here and there in various modifications. In the SK the butchers enjoyed themselves by crushing testicles – mainly that of Jews – by a wooden hammer on a stump. In “Industriehof II” an SS-man, nicknamed “Pearlie”, trained his dog, a wolf-hound, in assailing people, using for that purpose some human material in which no one was interested here at all. The wolf-hound assailed prisoners running by during their work, brought the weakened victims down to the ground, bit into their bodies, tear them with its teeth, jerked their sexual organs, strangled them.

The name of the first prisoner who gave a slip Oświęcim though at that time single fence of wires not charged with electricity, was spelled – as if just to spite the camp authorities – exactly: Tomasz Wiejowski. The authorities went mad. After the absence of one prisoner had been ascertained during the roll-call, the whole camp was retained on the square, standing at attention. Of course, no one managed to stand at attention. At the end of the standing,

the condition of the people deprived of food, deprived of any opportunity to go to the toilet, was lamentable. SS-men and capos ran among the ranks, beating with sticks those who were unable to keep standing. Some simply fainted of tiredness. Upon an intervention of a German doctor, the commander of the camp replied: "Let them die. When half of them is dying, I will release them!" This doctor began to go through the ranks and persuade to lie down. When a huge mass of people was lying on the ground and capos were unwilling to beat, the end of standing at attention was announced at last.

In the next months the fence was worked upon. The second fence of wire was erected around the first one, at a distance of several meters from it. On both sides of the wire fences, high concrete fences were constructed, to secure the camp against being viewed from the outside. Much later the wire fences were charged with high voltage. Round the camp, between the concrete fence and the wire one, wooden turrets were put up, which controlled the whole camp by their location and machine guns, by which SS-men stood on guard. So, escapes were attempted not from the camp, but from work places, to which prisoners would go outside the wires. Gradually, repressions for escapes became less stern to such a measure that we stood on roll-calls as long as – if it was an evening roll-call – to eat cold food just before the gong for sleep. Yet there were no rules in it, and sometimes we lost our supper or dinner.

But punishments for attempts of escape did not become less stern. Such a prisoner always paid with the loss of his life, being killed just upon his capture or put into the bunker or hanged in public. Prisoner caught during his unsuccessful escape was dressed in a dunce cap and other pieces of frippery were hanged on him, in derision. A plaque was hanged in his neck, with an inscription "this is an ass... he tried to escape..." etc. Additionally, a drum was tied to his waist, and the might-have-been escaper, dressed like a comedy actor, beating the drum, conducted his last

march on Earth, among his colleagues standing in rows in the roll-call – to the joy of the “dogs” of the camp. The blocks, dressed for the roll-call, met this macabre comedy with deep silence.

Before such a delinquent had been found, blocks had been “standing at attention”. Several hundreds of prisoners commanded by a herd of capos with a heard of dogs set off to search the escaper (escapers), who mainly were hiding themselves somewhere in the area between the small and the large chain of guard posts, unless they managed to cross the large chain of guards. Posts on turrets of the large chain of guards had not been withdrawn until the number of prisoners of the evening roll-call was equal to the number of prisoners in the camp on the current day.

Some time on an evening roll-call on some exceptionally rainy and cold day, when it was raining and snowing in turn, a horrible siren sounded out – an ominous forecast of “standing at attention”. Two missing prisoners were recorded. Punitive turn of “standing at attention” was ordered, until the escapers were found, who must have hid somewhere in the “Industriehof II”. Capos, dogs and several hundreds of prisoners were sent for search, which lasted for a long time. Snow, rain, tiredness of work, insufficient clothing of prisoners, was doing for us on that day very painfully during the standing. At last a gong announced that the escapers had been found. Only inert dead bodies of those poor men returned to the camp. Some capo, mad due to prolonged work day, transfixed one of the men from the back with a sharp narrow plank right through his kidneys and stomach, and he, fainted, his twisted face blue, was carried by four tall fellows into the camp. Yes, the escape did not pay to those prisoners and it was an act of great egoism, as the “standing at attention” of thousands of their colleagues in the cold resulted in more than a hundred of dead bodies. They died of sheer cold, lost their strength to live. Others were taken to the hospital, where they died during the night.

Sometimes, although nobody had escaped from the camp, but the weather was foul, we were retained on the roll-call for a long

time – for several hours, as supposedly they could not get the count of our exact number. The authorities went off somewhere under a roof, supposedly to make the count – while we were done away by cold, rain or snow and the pressure to stand motionless in one place. You had to defend yourself by your whole organism, to strain and release your muscles to generate some heat to rescue your life.

During roll-calls, an SS-man “Blockführer” received a report from the block supervisor, a prisoner. Having received several reports, the SS-man went before the desk of the “Rapportführer” who was SS-Obersturmführer Gerhard Palitsch, whom SS-men themselves feared like fire. He used to punish them with the bunker for any trifle; an SS-man could go to the front for his report. So he was a terror for everybody. When Palitsch appeared, silence would hang over.

THE “VOLKSDEUTCHE”: “THEY USED TO DO AWAY POLES”

Some people began to climb up to supervisor positions, whom I previously considered to be Poles but who, in a large percentage, had renounced their Polish nationality here – they were Silesians. I had held the best opinion of them previously – but here I could not believe my own eyes. They used to do away Poles and did not consider them to be their countrymen, while they considered themselves to be some German tribe. One time I called the attention of a Vorarbeiter of Silesian origin: “What are you beating him for? After all, he’s a Pole”. He answered me: “But I’m not a Pole – I am a Silesian. My parents wanted to make me a Pole, but a Silesian means Germany. A Pole must live in Warsaw and not in Silesia.” And he continued beating with his stick.

There were two Silesians – block supervisors: Skrzypek and Bednarek, who were, maybe, even worse than the worst German. They did away so many prisoners with their sticks, that even the “Bloody Alois”, who in the meantime had taken a bit “for retention”, was unable to keep on a level with them. Every day, while standing in the evening roll-call you could see, on the left wing of the blocks, next to those butchers, some wheel-barrows full of dead bodies of prisoners. They boasted with their work to SS-men, whom they reported the numbers.

Nevertheless it cannot be generalised, because also here there were some exceptions from this rule, as was the case everywhere.

A Silesian who was a good Pole was rare here, but if such one appeared, you could safely entrust him with your life. He was a true friend. There was such block supervisor – Alfred Włodarczyk, also there was Symyczek, there were Silesians in our fives, about which I will write later.

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“THERE WAS AN OUTFLOW VIA THE CREMATORIUM CHIMNEY”

The “Bloody Alois”, whom I had mentioned, was no longer a block supervisor. Block 17a (old numbering) was turned into a warehouse for bags of prisoners’ clothes. Transports of prisoners continued to come in, getting the serial number higher and higher, but the number of people present in the camp was not increasing at all. There was an outflow via the crematorium chimney. But the “effects” – bags of our property – were stored with care. They took up the whole free place in block 18. So the premises of the warehouse of the “Effektenkammer” were extended by one whole storey in 17 (block 17a); all prisoners were moved in various blocks.

Since 26 October I lived in block 3a (second storey), where Koprowiak was block supervisor. Somebody used to say very positively about his past in some prison. Here I sometimes saw him beating – perhaps his nerves broke down then. Nevertheless, he used to beat mainly when a German was looking. Perhaps he wanted to shirk his life, perhaps his position. In his post of a block supervisor, he was one of the best supervisors for Polish prisoners. In block 3a I lived in the first room, the supervisor of which was Drozd. A kind-hearted type, his attitude to colleagues of that room was cordial – no beating. The block supervisor gave him free hand in this respect.

“A MODERN SWEEPSTAKE”

One time, from the second storey of that block I saw a scene, which stuck in my memory for long time. I remained in the camp during the workday. I went to the ambulance, called there by a written note. Upon my return I remained in the block. It was drizzling and the day was gloomy. The SK was working in the square, transporting gravel, which was being thrown out by spades from a pit. Additionally, some commando was present, freezing and exercising gymnastics. Near the pit, several SS-men were standing, who, while they could not depart the commandos in fear of Palitsch or of the commander, who on that day was walking about throughout the camp, invented an entertainment for themselves. They bet something, each of them put a banknote on a brick. Then they buried a prisoner in sand, head down, and carefully covered him. Looking at their watches, they counted how many minutes he would move his legs. A modern sweepstake, I thought. Apparently, that one who was nearest the truth in his prediction for how long such a buried man would be able to move before he was dead, swept the money.

“A JOKE IN GERMAN STYLE” ON CHRISTMAS 1940

So the year 1940 came to an end.

Before I managed to get into the woodwork shop and take advantage of its benefits, that is additional food in block 5, the hunger, which tortured me, had been intensified so much that I began to devour with my eyes the bread received in the evening by those, who, placed in their “positions”, were able to save part of their bread until morning. I fought probably the heaviest fight against myself in my life. The problem was, how to eat something immediately and save it until the evening... But I would not explain hunger to satiated people... or to those who received parcels from home or from the Red Cross, while living without any compulsion to work, later complained they had been very hungry. Ah! The intensity of hunger is spanned along a whole scope of graduation. Sometimes it seemed to me that I was able to cut off a chunk of the body of a dead man lying by the hospital. It was then, just before Christmas, when they began to give us pearl barley in place of the “tea”, which was a great benefit and I do not know, to whom we were indebted for that (it was continued until spring).

For Christmas holiday, several beautifully illuminated Christmas trees were put up in the camp. In the evening, capos put two prisoners on stools by the Christmas tree and thrashed 25 sticks each of them, upon a part of their bodies called the “soft” one. It was intended to be a joke in German style.

25

“PUNISHMENTS IN OŚWIĘCIM WERE GRADED”

Punishments in Oświęcim were graded.

The lightest punishment was beating on the stool. It was done in public, in face of all colleagues standing on a roll-call. A “piece of execution furniture” was ready – a stool, equipped with holders for legs and hands on both sides. Two tall fellows of SS-men stood (often Seidler personally or, sometimes, a senior of the camp, Bruno) and beat a prisoner in unclothed part of his body, so that not to destroy his clothes. Beating was done with a leather whip or, simply, with a heavy stick. After a dozen of blows, the body was cut apart. Blood began to stream and further blows struck as if minced collops. I witnessed that many times. Sometimes 50 blows were received, sometimes 75. One time, with a measure of punishment of 100 blows, circa the 90th blow a prisoner – a starveling – ended his life. If the delinquent remained alive, he had to stand up, make several knee-bending to regulate his blood circulation and, standing at attention, to thank for the right measure of punishment.

The next punishment was a bunker, of two kinds. A simple bunker – it was a set of cells in the basement of block 13 (old numbering), where capos and SS-men were mainly kept until their interrogation, at the disposal of the political department, or serving their punishment. The simple bunker cells included 3 parts of the basement of block 13, in the remaining 4 part there was a cell similar to those ones, but deprived of any light – called a “dark”

one. In one end of the block, the basement corridor turned right at a square and ended immediately. In this branch of the corridor, there were small bunkers of quite different kind. There were three so-called “standing cells “ (Stehbunker). Behind a rectangular opening in the wall, through which only a bowed man could go, there was a quasi-cupboard of 80 x 80 centimetres, 2 meters high, so that you could stand freely. But to such a “cupboard”, four prisoners were pushed in with the help of a stick, and, the door locked with bars, they remained there until morning (from 7:00 p.m. until 6:00 a.m.). It may seem impossible, there are witnesses alive until now, who served a “Stehbunker” punishment in the company of their colleagues, pushed into such “cupboard” in the number of eight men! In the evening they were released and taken to work, but for the night they were again pushed in, like sardines, and locked with the use of iron bars till morning. The measure of punishment reached usually up to 5 nights, but sometimes it could be much higher. Whoever had no connections with the authority in his work place, he usually ended his life at his work, due to lack of strength, after one or several such nights. Who was able to rest in his commando in the daytime, he could happily survive that punishment.

The third kind of punishment was a simple “post”, borrowed from Austrian methods of investigation. With such a difference, that those hanged, tied by their hands in the back, were sometimes swung for fun by a supervising SS-man. Then the joints were creaking, ropes were cutting into the body. It was good, if “Pearlie” with his dog did not come in. In such a way investigations were sometimes conducted, while the hanged man was given juice of pickle to drink, in short – vinegar, so that he would not faint too early.

But the fourth and most heavy kind of punishment was an execution by firing: death afflicted quickly, how much more humanitarian and how much desired by those having been tortured for a long time. An “execution” is not a right term, the right one

would be shooting dead, or just killing. This was also done in block 13 (old numbering). There was a yard there, confined by blocks (between 12th and 13th block). From the east closed by a wall, which connected the blocks and was called the “wailing-wall”. From the west there was also a wall, in which there was a gate, mainly closed, which shut out the view. It opened its double door before a living victim or to throw out dead bodies covered with blood. Passing that place, you smelled an odour like in a butchery. Red stream was running along in a little gutter. The small gutter was repeatedly white-washed, but nearly every day the stream was meandering again among the white banks.... Ah! Were it not be blood... human blood... Polish blood... and also the best one... then perhaps you could delight in the mere composition of colours... That was in the outside. In the inside, very grave and terrible things took place. The butcher Palitzsch – a handsome boy, who did not use to beat anybody in the camp, as it was not his style, inside the closed yard he was the main author of macabre scenes. Those doomed, in row, stood naked against the “wailing-wall”, he put a small calibre rifle under the skull in the back of their heads, and put an end to their lives. Sometimes he used a simple bolt used to kill cattle. The spring bolt cut into the brain, under the skull, and put an end to their lives. Sometimes a group of civilians were brought in, who had been tormented by inquiries in the basement, and were given to Palitzsch for fun. Palitzsch ordered the girls to undress and to run about the closed yard. Standing in the centre, he would choose for a long time, then took aim, fired and killed – all of them by turns. No one of them knew who of them would be killed immediately and who would live for a while or perhaps be taken for an investigation... He was training himself in accurate aiming and shooting.

Those scenes were seen from block 12 by several room supervisors, who were on guard, so that no prisoner could approach the windows. Windows were secured by “baskets”, but not tight enough – so it was seen in details.

Another time, from block 12 it was seen a family carried here, which stood in the yard against the “Wailing Wall”. Palitsch shot at the father of the family first and killed him under his wife’s and his children’s eyes. After a while he killed a small girl who was holding her pale mother’s hand with all her might. Then he wrenched away from the mother a small child, whom that unhappy woman was pressing tightly to her bosom. He clasped the legs – broke the head by the wall. In the end he killed the mother half-conscious of pain. It was a scene related me by several colleagues – witnesses, so precisely and so identically, that I cannot have any doubt, that it was exactly in this way.

26

“NO, NO! NOT FOOD PARCELS!”

On Christmas of 1940 prisoners for the first time received parcels from their families. No, no! Not food parcels! Food parcels were not allowed at all, not to make us too happy. So, some of us received their first parcel in Oświęcim – a clothes parcel, containing things prescribed in advance: a sweeter, scarf, gloves, ear-protectors, socks. It was not allowed to send more. If a parcel contained underwear, it went into a bag in the “Effektekammer” under the prisoner’s number, and was kept in store there. So it was in that time. Later, we succeeded to reach everywhere through our organised colleagues. The Christmas parcel was the only one during a year and although it did not contain food, it was indispensable due to warm clothes and nice feeling, as it was from home.

FOOD SUPPLY WAS ILLEGAL

During Christmas, Westrych together with the capo of the woodwork shop contrived to get additional pots of excellent stew from the SS-men kitchen and a revel took place in the woodwork shop; carpenters, who turned up by turn, were treated. Such pots came in several times, delivered in deep secret by SS-men who received money collected by Westrych from us.

Part II

1941

28

FURTHER WORK IN BLOCK 5

The year 1941 commenced for me with a further carpentry work in block 5, where I continued to devise some work. The block supervisor did not interfere in my work. I met colleague Gierych here, son of a pair of my acquaintances, whose flat I had used in Orzeł in 1916/1917 for the purpose of conspiracy. Senior of the camp, Leo, came to block 5 nearly every day (prisoner's number 30). Upon the entry to the room, of an SS-man or a senior of the camp, a shout "Achtung!" and a report were obligatory. I did it perfectly, adding in the end of my report: "...ein Tischler bei der Arbeit." It suited Leon (Leon Wiczorek). He was not interested at all what I had been doing here for so long, and he left the room like a peacock.

29

YOUNGSTER PRISONERS AND PERVERT CAPOS

Block 5 was a block of adolescents, boys of 15 – 18 lived here, whose the Third Reich still hoped to gain over. They had a kind of courses here. Leo came here every day, he liked youth, but he liked boys... too much. He was a pervert. He chose victims of his perversion here. Fed them up, regenerated, compelled to submission by welfare, or threatening with a punitive commando, and when he was fed up with the boy, so that not to have an inconvenient witness of his forbidden conduct, he hanged his victim, mainly at night in the toilet.

FIRED FROM BLOCK 5

About 15 January I stood by the window, when Leo came in to the room. I did not notice him and did not shout “Achtung!”, as my attention was drawn by the view of a “Zugang” through the window pane. At the same time, I noticed colonel 11 outside the window. It was visible that Leo was dissatisfied. He approached me and said: “You are here in the block too long. Mind you not to come here any more.”

I told Westrych of that, yet he ordered me to go there. So on the next day I went again to block 5. Soon after me Leo came and went mad: “Deine nummer?” – he shouted but – strangely – he did not strike me: “Rrrraus mit dem alles!” – he pointed my tools. I took myself away quickly enough, while he was noting my number and shouting behind me I would be fired from the woodwork shop as quickly as today. In the shop I told everything to Westrych. Just after me Leo burst in. Happily, the capo was absent. He was substituted by Westrych, who let Leo shout at will and then explained that this carpenter had reported of all that had happened the day before, but he ordered him today to go to block 5 to take all his tools away out of there. And Leo regained his composure.

Nevertheless I continued to be a carpenter, just in case I worked in the second room occupied by this woodwork shop in the same block 9. After several days Westrych ordered me to take my tools and to follow him into the camp. He led me to block 15 (old

numbering). It was prisoner hospital. The hospital supervisor, a little crazy German in general, wanted to keep order in his block after all. Westrych had advised him the day before to frame straw mattresses with wooden slats. There were no beds there. Ill people lay side by side on the floor, in horrible conditions. Straw mattresses thrown upon the floor (those ill lay their heads to the wall), not always in-line, made the picture worse. It was decided to apply slats at the ends of straw mattresses laid in two rows by the walls. Those slats, running along the room, would leave a straight-framed passage on the floor.

Block supervisor scrutinized me and asked if I was able to do that work. For my bad work, I would face a stick on the stool, for my good work – an everyday second meal. So I started my work and equipped room by room with slat frames, fixing the slats to the floor with squares. An engineer from Warsaw was assigned as my aid, sent by Westrych. We both ate second meal every day. There was sufficient food in the block. It was given to all and some ill persons did not want to touch it. The Warsaw engineer became infected with flue here. Accepted to the hospital in the same block, in such conditions as they were in HKB, among terrible louses, he soon ended his life. I finished alone the slat work.

FIRST ILLNESS. HOSPITAL: A CRUST OF LOUSES
ON YOUR FACE. FIRST DE-LOUSING. HAPPY
RESCUE

Soon it was my turn. I was infected with some flue or I got frozen on a roll-call. The winter was quite sharp. Although we had overcoats given to us before Christmas, but they were “Ersatz” ones, unlined, they very poorly protected us against frost. I was fighting against the disease for several days. I had a temperature, which in evenings reached 39 degrees, so I could be accepted to the hospital without any backing. But I did not want to go to the hospital. There were two reasons: terrible louses in the hospital and the end of my work in the woodwork shop.

So I defended as I could, but the disease hooked tight on me and did not want to abate. The worse was I stood on roll-calls with a burning head, while being penetrated by wind. I do not know, how that contest would end. Quite another thing was decisive in it. In the block, in the first room, we still had acceptable relations. Our room supervisor Drozd was replaced by another one – Antek Potocki. Some of us fulfilled various duties of housework. I was in charge of windows, doors and lamps.

All that could be withstood in the block, if we all were not a bit lousy. Each evening, louses were being hunted obstinately. I myself used to kill about hundred every day, hoping that no more of them would come in the night, but on the next day there was a new hundred again. It was difficult to hunt more in evenings, as

light was switched off at a prescribed hour. On days, at work, you also could not be busy doing it. In the night, louses used to come from your blanket upon your shirt. It would be of no use to pick them up from the blanket; all blankets were put together for the day – so every day we received another blanket. With a hot stove, those creatures used to wander willingly into a clean blanket.

At last, a de-lousing was ordered. Nevertheless it was very ill-time for me. I had a higher temperature. In the evening we were ordered to undress. We delivered our dresses threaded on wires for steaming. Then we went naked to shower-bath in block 18 (old numbering) and, naked, to block 17 (old numbering). There we sat down, several hundred people, in a room and it was terribly stuffy there. In the morning we were given clothes and driven through a wind and frost to block 3a. I gave away my overcoat to Antek Potocki, who was also ill. I was done for by that night.

Nearly fainted, I went to the hospital. Sprinkled with water in a bath, I was laid in block 15 (old numbering), in room 7 (where I had nailed slats to the floor), into terrible louses. Those several night of fighting against louses were, perhaps, the worse ones in the camp. I could not surrender – to let to be eaten by louses? But how to defend myself? When you looked at the blanket against the light – its all surface was moving. There were various louses – small, larger, squat, oblong, white and gray or red of blood, lined and striped ones, they were crawling, slowly and upon the backs of others. I was seized by abomination and a strong resolution not to be won by that loathsome mass. I tied my drawers tight around my ankles and in my waist, I buttoned my shirt up to my neck and in the end of my sleeves. It was out of question to kill them one by one. I squashed the insects by handfuls, while making quick movements, collecting them from my neck and from my legs and foots. My organism, weakened by temperature and continuous movements, was vehemently demanding for sleep. My head would fall down, but I raised it again. I could not allow fall asleep at any rate. To fall asleep would mean to stop fighting –

to let to be devoured. After an hour I got dark stains in my palms out of squashing the vermin – out of the gore of their bodies.

It was hopeless to kill them all. We were lying with little space, bodies wrapped with blankets, backs and sides leaned on each other. Not all defended themselves. Some were senseless, others were ruckling, they were unable to fight any more... Next to me an old senseless prisoner was lying (a mountaineer). I was never able to forget his face, it was just by my head – covered by a motionless crust of louses of various kinds, bitten into the skin. On my left side there lay a prisoner, who had passed away (Narkun), his blanket pulled upon his face, men with a stretcher were waited for. Louses on his blanket became to move more lively and march in my direction. In order to make mincemeat in my own blanket, it would be necessary to strike the blanket with a hammer- with a head or a stone, again and again, on an even floor. But it was nearly as impossible to get protected, as to stop a brook on its way – neither to break that movement, not to destroy it.

I admit here, that then it seemed to me for the first time I had too little strength to struggle, to wish to struggle at all. The condition of my mind was dangerous. To loose the hope of the sense of the fight, meant – to give way to despair. When I noticed it – I got revived. I continued to crush the louses on my neck and legs.

In place of the dead body, a new ill person, a boy of eighteen was laid. His name was Edek Salwa. When I fell asleep, he helped me out in sweeping the louses, sometimes with a knife and sometimes with a spoon, especially those advancing from the right side. He also was fighting for himself, in his blanket – so he was a neighbour who protected me from the left side and gave me some quiet. Additionally he bought bread for me from ill persons who were no longer able to eat. I ate everything. I had a strange nature – I noticed that many times. With a temperature – others do not eat, while I eat for several people. In general – this one who shrugs his

shoulder while reading this, he is asked to get to know me better – then he will understand that all my life is contrary-wise.

There were several kind-hearted men in this room, who made the last days of the ill people easier. They were Janek Hrebenda and Tadeusz Burski, both of them kind-hearted, good men, they worked at ill persons. They could not do much, but they did their best. Obviously, they were not able to change the conditions. For instance, in summer time it was not allowed to open windows, so that the ill would not get a cold, they all choked in hot and stink. Now, when there was great frost, all the windows were opened twice a day, it was aired long, while the frosty air, proceeding on the floor from the windows, shook with a shiver of cold the curled figures lying under thin, poor blankets.

I was struggling against the louses more than against the disease, for three days and two nights. On the third day, with no more strength, I decided to disclose my weakness to Władek. Through my friend, Tadek Burski, I send a note to doctor 2. Every note was suspected in the camp. It could be understood as a wish of communication by two prisoners acting to the detriment of the Third Reich. I wrote: "If you do not take me away immediately, I will loose the rest of my strength fighting against louses. In my present condition, I am approaching the crematorium chimney at an increased pace". And I indicated my place of residence.

After several hours doctor 2 appeared, assisted by doctor 12. Both of them were officially called hospital attendants ("Pfleger"). A Pole was not allowed to be doctor. But doctor 2 got the situation under such his control that he had some influence on the course of events in the hospital. Now he was on his round (it was not his department). He pretended he did not know me. He addressed doctor 12 with those words. "Well, what's wrong with that one? Please examine him." It turned out I had an inflammation of my left lung. Doctor 2 decided I should be taken for some experiment and some new injection should be applied.

We marched to block 20 (old numbering). I was laid in a bed in one of rooms in the second storey. I felt restored to life. There were no louses here. That meant, when I found 40-50 of them in my newly received underwear or in my blanket, it did not count. I just killed them and that was all. New ones would not climb the legs of a bed. They had not learned that so far. No matter that they laid me in a bed adjoining a window which was constantly open and wind was blowing in, while the incoming stream of cold air turned vapours by the window into mist. I tried to arrange my side, in which I had my lung inflammation, in such a way that it would be as little exposed to cold as possible. On the next day I was moved to the centre of the room, given four blankets, and the injection was applied. After ten days I was in so good health that I had to vacate my place for another ill person.

CONVALESCENCE

I was again moved to block 15, where I had lain in the initial days of my illness, but there were no louses there. In the meantime, the de-lousing, which was passing through all blocks, reached block 15. What a strange story. That macabre, that loused room – now treated with gas and whitewashed, made quite another appearance! It was 1 February 1941. Here I rested for one month after my illness, while helping Tadek and Janek Hrebenda. Our kind-hearted “Pfleger” Krzysztof Hoffman would often drop in to the room. Sometimes he slept in the room. Heniek Florczyk, a mathematician from Warsaw, was lying here. Tadek Burski (Raszyńska 56 street) was released from the camp due to efforts done by his sisters. Through him I sent a message to Warsaw.

Despite a change of the condition of the camp for the better, several ill persons died every day in the room. There was nothing to treat with and, after all, some pills that Krzysio had contrived to get, were pills only. Sometimes people simply did not want to live any more. They did not want to fight, and whoever gave up, he died very quickly. Here, as a convalescent, I got an opportunity, though acquainted attendants, to go out to the camp area (clothes from Fredek 4 were brought to me). I sometimes went out from the room, in such a way that the authorities did not notice me. I had more time to “tie my five”.

33

“THE CAMP WAS LIKE A HUGE MILL,
PROCESSING LIVING PEOPLE INTO ASH”

The camp was like a huge mill, processing living people into ash. We, prisoners, were done for in two ways. Parallel and mutually independent ones. Some people were working upon doing us away in our work of by the horrible conditions in the camp. Those ones, who were imprisoned for some grave cases and those ones who were not charged with any cases, died side by side. After all, no cases of prisoners on the Earth had any influence on it. Other people, as opposed to the former ones, were browsing our cases in the political department. And sometimes, may the prisoner caught hold on life for good, came to the top in his work, got along, and even was able to assure an inflow of food – yet on some day he died. His number was read on the evening roll-call. He had to go to the main chancellery (“Hauptschreibstube”), from there he was sent with an SS-man to the political department, and very often Palitzsch did him away in block 13 – executed him. It was a result of file-digging done by the second butcher Maximilian Grabner. Palitzsch received his “per head” fee for shooting people down. Often some agreements were concluded between those two gentlemen. One selected the cases while another fired shots in the back of the head. The money was divided and the business went on.

Death of one of my colleagues or another often hit a node of the organisational network – being arduously tied here after a

prolonged observation. The network was constantly being broken here and there – its sections had to be tied anew continually. Colleagues, who already had made some chain, felt morally stronger, entertaining the support of a number of friendly hearts, ready for mutual assistance, were slowly beginning to push themselves easier into various commandos.

PROGRESS OF CONSPIRACY

It was absolutely not allowed to talk of that, what everybody would call “organisation” before Oświęcim and I forbade to use that word. We picked up with joy a new meaning of that word and we “circulated” it widely throughout the camp, so that it would become commonly accepted. It was a kind of our lightning rod. The word “organisation” in the meaning: to contrive to get something “on the crook”. If somebody took out some cakes of margarine from the store in the night or a loaf of bread – it was called an “organisation of margarine or bread”. This one organised boots for him, while another one organised some tobacco. The word “organisation” was flourishing aloud everywhere, it was commonly known. Even if it reached the ears of some undesired person, used imprudently in the meaning of conspiracy, nobody understood it otherwise than to pilfer or to contrive to get something.

In our job, an average “cell” should not have known much. A colleague knew of the existence of a “framework”, his own several “contacts” and also knew who led him.

As an organisation we slowly began to get control of various commandos and to expand capacities. I decided to use the possibilities of German capos, those ones who used beating unwillingly (there were several of them) – I found my way to them through our members.

PROFILE OF SUPERVISORS: BUTCHERS AND GOOD MEN

In the initial phase of existence of the “Oświęcim” concentration camp, where murder was started in the moment of the arrival of the first transport of Poles on 14 June 1940, the apparatus engaged in doing prisoners away was composed of 30 Germans or such people, who pretended to be Germans, delivered here from Oranienburg in May 1940.

Although they were prisoners themselves, they were chosen as our butchers. They wore the lowest numbers of Oświęcim prisoners. The first and the last of them, that is Prisoner no 1 “Bruno” and prisoner no 30 “Leo”, were given the bands of seniors of the camp, several others had bands of block supervisors, while the rest – those of capos.

Among that herd of gangsters who worked with horrible brutality or perfidy upon murdering of prisoners, there were several ones who used beating unwillingly, rather out of necessity, not to anger that herd or SS-men. Our prisoners discovered that very quickly. We, as organisation, decided to get use of it. Well, soon Otto (prisoner no 2) as Arbeitsdienst, Balke (prisoner no 3) as “oberkapo” of the woodwork shop, “Mummy” (prisoner no 4), so nicknamed for his attitude to us in the kitchen, Bock – “Daddy” (prisoner no 5) in HKB, Konrad (prisoner no 18), “Jonny” (prisoner no 19) – began to render services to us, while they did not know at all and did not suspect the existence of any organisa-

tional network. Our colleagues would go to them, seemingly in their personal or their friends' matters, and they – if they were able to do so – accommodated us. Otto – by giving assignment cards to work in some chosen commandos, Balke – by giving accommodation in the woodwork shop under the roof to as many our colleagues as possible, “Mummy” – by giving second meals (soups from the kitchen) to those extremely exhausted, Bolek – by facilitating our work in the hospital, “Johnny” – who as the capo of the Landwirtschaft commando, initially did not obstruct and later facilitated our communication with the outer world by making contacts with the organisations outside the camp, with the cooperation of Miss Zofia S. (Stare Stawy) and must have guessed more. He did not betrayed us, and from the moment, when for an “oversight” proved against him by the authorities of the camp – nothing more entered the heads of the authorities – he received a portion of stick blows on the stool, he became our true friend.

So I was arranging and tying, while having exceptionally much time, by the conditions of that period, when I was a convalescent during February 1941 in the hospital, block 15 (old numbering). So it was until 7 March.

FIRST INQUIRY

Suddenly, several occurrences coincided. On 6 March in the evening I was summoned to the Erkennungsdiens, block 18 (old numbering), where all had been photographed before. My photograph was shown to me and I was asked If I knew the numbers of those photographed before me and after me (prisoners' numbers neighbouring to my number). I replied I did not know. The SS-man took a derisive air and told it was very suspicious if I would not recognize those with whom I had arrived. Then he scrutinised my photograph and told I there was very little similarity and it was also very suspicious.. Indeed, I tried to have an unnatural appearance and air, and I stuffed my cheeks when the photograph was made. I replied I had had sore kidneys, which resulted in swelling.

On the same day of 6 March, Sławek informed me that on the next day he would be released from the camp and he would go to Warsaw. He was always an optimist – he declared he would wait for me in Warsaw. He was released without quarantine – so it was practised in that time. Efforts done by his wife through the Swedish consulate released him.

At the same time I got to know through doctor 2 that on the next day in the morning I would be summoned to the main chancellery, while it was commonly known in what it resulted in most cases. I did not know the reasons and racked my brain for what the reason was. I had no case. It only entered my head that Westrych

could “give away”, purposefully or by an indiscretion, that I was here under a false name. Westrych had been released from the camp just two weeks before. Perhaps, before his departure he “confessed” the secret. In such case I would be doomed.

Doctor 2 was very perturbed by my case and taught me how I should imitate a disease frequent in that time in HKB, that is meningitis, which would protect me against answering. He tried to know something though one SS-man, who formerly had been a non-commissioned officer in the Polish army, what the case was, and asked him not to beat very much his colleague (me), who was ill. Doctor 2 was slowly getting his position in the hospital, he was already appreciated as doctor and had some connections among SS-men, whom he sometimes advised.

In the morning, on 7 March, in the roll-call my name was read with the order to go to the main chancellery. There were several of us. We were drawn up separately. All block was looking at us as if we were not to return. They were not mistaken very much. Upon a sound of the gong, when all were running to their work units, the several of us marched to block 9 (old numbering). In the corridor before the main chancellery each of us was called up and numbers of those brought in were checked, while there were twenty odds of us from various blocks.

I alone was put aside. What was on? – I thought. Why not together? I was pointed by one’s finger and an SS-man was told something which I failed to hear. Evidently, in their meaning I was a “rogue”. But things went on a bit differently than it could have been expected. All others marched off to the political department, while I was led to the Erkennungsdienst. That’s better – I thought.

On my way, I began to understand why I was summoned, and I got more quiet with each my step. All prisoners were obliged to write letters to their families and only to the address they had given upon their arrival. (Shortly after our arrival to Oświęcim, a night interrogation was done. Each of us was waken up, ordered to tell – block 17a – by which, with a strange smile, they asked for

an address on which to write in case of an accident which might happen to the prisoner – as if people died here by accident). They ordered to write letters every two weeks, so that they would have a trace to prisoner's family. I gave the address of my sister-in-law in Warsaw, through whom messages were to be received by my family, of which the authorities of the camp could not know. The address of my sister-in-law was given as an address of one of my friends, I was reputed to be a bachelor who had no family except his mother. I wrote to the given address only once, in November, to inform where I was. Then I wrote no more letters, with a view to that, that my "friend" would not bear consequences of my possible doings here. In this way I wanted to break all the thread, visible to German authorities, which connected me with people at freedom.

Behind the gate I entered, escorted by an SS-man, a wooden building, in one end of which (next to the gate) the "Blockführerstube" was placed, actually- the "Postzensurstelle". A dozen or so of SS-men were seated at tables here. In the moment I was led in, all of them rose their heads and after a while they continued their work of censoring letters. The SS-man who was going before me reported our arrival. Upon that, another one said to me: "A! Mein lieber Mann... why don't you write any letters?!"

I replied: – I write.

— Ah... And you are lying! What do you mean by that you write? All outgoing letters are recorded by us!

— I write but they are returned to me. I have evidence for that.

— They are returned? Ha! Ha! Evidence... Well, well, he has evidence!

Several SS-men encircled me and were making fun of me.

— What evidence do you have?!

— I have letters which I wrote regularly and which, I do not know why, were returned to me – I spoke in such a way as if I regretted the groundless return of my letters.

— Where do you have those letters?!

— In block 15.

— Hans! Lead him back to the block, let him take those letters, but if he wouldn't find them... – here he addressed me – Ich sehe schwarz für dich!

I really had those letters in the block. In anticipation of such inspections I used to write “regular” letters, which began with the stereotype phrases: “Ich bin gesund und es geht mir gut...”, without which – as it was announced by block supervisors – no letter would pass the censorship (even if a prisoner was just dying, then, if he wished to write to his family once more, he was obliged to put in these words). Nevertheless, the family was probably able to guess from his handwriting, how he was and what his health was. Basically, all were entitled to write letters to their loved ones. Often, with a view to oneself and for some money to be remitted – letters were generally written). Nevertheless I noticed that letters returned to prisoners, those which did not pass the censorship – which SS-men did not like for some reasons – wore on their envelopes a specific green check mark or, sometimes, the word “zurück”. I acquired two such envelopes and with the same pencil, delivered by captain 3, I marked my envelopes and did not give them away when letters were collected in the blocks on “letter Sundays”. I carefully saved those letters.

While going with the SS-man for those letters (7 March), in the gate I met Sławek who was led by an SS-man for release. I fetched the letters from room 7 of block 15 (old numbering). My colleagues in the room, when they saw the SS-man waiting for me and some papers, were sure it was a case of the political department and they would not see me any more.

In the “Postzensurstelle” I was received with interest. My 6 or 7 letters given to the chief by the SS-man who was escorting me, interested several other SS-men.

— So there are the letters.

I must have made the green-pencil check marks quite well. Anyway, they did not expect a prisoner to write letters and not to

mail them. They began to study their contents. There was nothing in them – they were quite brief.

— Ah! So, you don't write to the address you gave?!

I replied I thought the letters were returned me due to some mistake, as I wrote to the address I had given. They checked it. It must have been O.K.

— Well, but who is that Mrs E.O., whom do you write to?

— A friend.

— A friend? – it was drawled with a scoffing smile – But why don't you write to your mother? Here you declare you have mother!

In fact I declared it, although my Mother was dead for two years. I wanted to be as little suspicious as possible, as a bird with no link to the earth, I suggested I had a loved one on the Earth, but I did not want to give the address of living persons. I was forced to break all contact with people at freedom.

— Oh, yes – I replied – I have my Mother, but my Mother is abroad. After all, Wilno is located abroad, so I don't know if I may send my letters there.

The SS-men went off to their work. The case slowly began to subside in its embitterment.

— Well – the chief judged in Solomon's style – the letters are returned to you because you don't write to your mother, although you have one, while you write to some friend. You must file an application to the Lagerkomendant to allow you to change the address and you must declare you wish to write to Mrs E.O. The application shall be sent through the official channel, through your block supervisor.

Thus my case in the "Postzensurstelle" was ended.

On the next day I rushed with my application to block 3a, where the block supervisor Koprowiak could not understand how it was possible that so far I had written to the address of Mrs E.O. and then I kindly asked the commander to change the address to the same address of the same Mrs E.O.

But before I arrived to block 3a on the next day, a surprise was in store for me on the same day (7 March) in block 15. I alone returned to block 15, out of the group summoned in the evening. The butcher Palitsch cut the ways of their lives, running through the political department and ended in the yard of block 13.

I returned from the "Postzensurstelle" to block 15 just in the moment when a commission was present in the room, making an inspection of patients. All, who had not a temperature, were expelled to the camp, to the blocks from which they had got into the hospital. And suddenly a "patient" arrived and came in, dressed up, from his walk in the camp. I got several strikes in my belly and head and I was immediately expelled from the hospital.

IN THE GREAT WOODWORK SHOP. CREATION OF THE SECOND AND THIRD 'FIVES'

Therefore on the next day I wrote the application in block 3a. But the question was not this application but how to get into a commando under the roof. Westrych was present no more. The small woodwork shop in block 9 (old numbering) had been liquidated. The great woodwork shop was in the "Industriehof I" and was conducted and expanded by oberkapo Balke. I had to contrive immediately how to get under a roof. My convalescence was ended, but a work in the frost just immediately after the hospital would be too heavy for me. It was time when prisoners working in any commando were recorded scrupulously, so to fall into an improper commando would mean further troubles in "coming off" if I wanted to change my labour unit to a better one.

He my colleagues came to the rescue of me. Several members of our organisation had already been employed in the great woodwork shop in the "Industriehof I", while one of them Antek (14) was foreman there, who supervised the work. Also, Czesiek (9) worked there. Antek (14) led me to Balke's office and introduced me as a good carpenter. Upon the question what I knew, I answered according to Antek's instruction that I knew how to operate machines. And it so happened that machines were just supplied and installed in the woodwork shop. Balke gave his consent.

For the time being I was shirked in the shops, in charge of Władek Kupiec. The work was not burdensome. Władek Kupiec was an exceptionally honest chap and a good colleague. Six brothers of them were there. I also met several of my friends, one of them named Witold (15), another one's name was Pilecki (22).

After several days of my work in the woodwork shop I organised a second "five" composed of: Władek (17), Bolek (18), Witold (15), Tadek (19), Antek (14), Janek (20), Tadek (21), Antek (22).

After several weeks of my work I heard, what was told among my colleagues, that colonel 23 and lieutenant-colonel 24 were planning some attempt in the camp, upon which lieutenant-colonel 24 would go to Katowice with prisoners in good health while colonel 23 would remain in place with those ill ones. Because of the naiveness of that planning and de conspiracy of similar plans towards a wider circle of prisoners, I abstained from talking about organisational matters with those officers, and, in general, in the initial time I abstained from introducing senior officers to the organisation, who were here under their actual names (except colonel 1 whom I fully trusted), from that reason that those officers about whom the camp authorities officially knew, in case of any suspicions might be locked up in the bunker and tortured, might be put to a heavy test of silence.

So it was in the initial phase of our organisational work. Later, it was otherwise. In April and May 1941 huge transports of Poles, prisoners of Pawiak, arrived. Many of my acquaintances came in. So I created the third "five", to which I recruited my former deputy from my work in Warsaw, "Czesław III" (25), Stasiak (26), Jurek (27), Szczepan (28), Włodek (29), Genek (30). Our organisation was being developed at quick rate.

But the machinery of the camp was also in a hurry with doing us away. The camp "snapped" the Warsaw transports, which received such a thrashing as we had received before, dying in masses, decimated every day by cold and beating.

38

“THE ‘HEROES’ DRESSED IN THE UNIFORM OF THE GERMAN SOLDIER”. THE CAMP ORCHESTRA.

A novelty in the camp since the spring 1941 was an orchestra. The commander liked music – due to which it was created an orchestra of good musicians, of whom there was no shortage in the camp, as was the case with other professionals. Work in the orchestra was a good “position”, so everybody who had any instrument at home, brought it here quickly and enrolled the orchestra which, conducted by “Franz” (a dirty dog) who previously had been capo in the kitchen, played various compositions.

The orchestra was really up to the mark. And it was a pride of the commander of the camp. If a professional of any instrument was missing, such one was very easily found “in civilian” and brought to the camp. The orchestra was admired not only by the commander but also by all commissions, which sometimes popped in at the camp.

The orchestra played for us four times a day. In the morning, when we were coming out to our work, when we were returning for dinner, when we were going off to our work after dinner and upon our return for the evening roll-call. The place for productions of the orchestra was in front of block 9 (old numbering), near the gate, where all commandos used to march through. All the macabre could be felt especially upon a return of our units from work. The trudging columns were dragging the bodies of colleagues killed during the work. Some dead bodies were ap-

palling. By the tones of lively marches played at quick tempo, which rather resembled polka or oberek dances, the beaten and staggering figures of prisoners exhausted by their work were returning. The ranks made an effort to walk in step while dragging the dead bodies of their colleagues, often half-naked, as clods of earth, mud and stones had shoved parts of their clothes away. Columns of immeasurable human misery, encircled by a ring of beaters, lashed by sticks, were forced to walk in time of merry music. Whoever was not walking in step, he got a stroke by a rod upon his head and after a while he was himself being dragged by his colleagues.

All that was escorted by two chains of armed men – of “heroes” dressed in the uniform of the German soldier. Before the gate, to ensure more safety, in addition to the armed units there stood a group of “superior men” – of the ranks of the camp – of junior officers (on whom the blame could possibly be laid in future – what to be expected from those bumpkins?). All of them bump-tious, with joyfully beaming face, looking proudly at the dying and hated race of “untermenschen”.

“OLD NUMBERS WERE SCARCE”. A REFLECTION ON 20TH CENTURY

So the commandos of those who worked in the field returned. Old numbers were scarce among them. Such ones had either already “gone” through “the chimney” or managed to get under the roof. They were mainly “zugangs”. Hundreds of those employed in the shops returned in another way – strong, in good health, they were walking at firm pace in dressed-up fives. Then, a smile of satisfaction vanished from the lips of that heard by the gate. They mainly turned away unfavourably. Nevertheless, for the time being, the shop men were necessary for them. Many an SS-man ordered a product necessary for him in one shop or another, which was made “on the crook” without the knowledge of the authorities. Even those who stood here used to order some pieces of work privately, keeping secret from one another. Each of them feared a report to the higher authority in this respect. Quite a different matter was to murder people – the more murdered people the conscious of any of them was burdened by, the better reputation he used to enjoy.

Those were the things, which I describe as that they “did not occur on Earth”. How could this be? The culture... the 20th century... Who heard of killing a man? Anyway, this could not be done unpunished on Earth. Although it is the 20th century and the culture is at a very high level – the war is somehow smuggled by “people of high culture”, who even explain its need. And in the

opinion of some cultural men, the war becomes “indispensable and necessary”. Well, but so far (to admit a mask to cover the need of murder by some and an interest by others) it was told openly of a mutual murder of some part of the population – the armed military alone. Probably so it was some time ago. It is just a beautiful past.

What can the human race tell today, that human race which wants to prove a progress of culture and to put the 20th century in a much higher position than previous centuries? At all, may we, the people of the 20th century, face those who lived earlier, and – absurdly – to prove our superiority when in our times an armed mass destroys not an enemy army, but all nations, defenceless populations, using the latest achievements of technology? A progress of civilisation – yes! But a progress of culture? – absurd.

We became involved in a terrible way, my dear friends. A horrible thing, no words to express it! I wanted to use the word: bestiality... but not! We are by the whole hell far worse, than the beasts!

I have full right to write this, especially after what I saw there and what became to occur in Oświęcim one year later.

“PRISONERS WHO MET A GOOD FORTUNE TO
BECOME SWINE-HERDS, ATE SOME PORTIONS OF
EXCELLENT FOOD TAKEN AWAY FROM PIGS”

As great was the difference between “to be” and “not to be”, so great was the difference in the conditions of life of those who worked under the roof (in stables, stores or workshops) from those who ended their life in the fields in various ways. The former ones were considered indispensable here, the latter paid with their lives for the order to do away as many people as possible in that mill. This privilege had to be paid in some way, justified. It was paid with one’s profession or shrewdness, by which a profession had to be substituted.

The camp was self-sufficient. Corn was sown, living stock was kept: horses, cows and pigs. There was a slaughter-house to process animal meat into edible products. Next to the slaughter-house there stood a crematorium where a bulk of human meat was being processed into ash to fertilize fields – the only use which could be derived from that meat.

The best under-the-roof position was that in the pigsty of swine, the food of which was much more copious and much better than that in the pots of the kitchen. Pigs received scraps of food left uneaten by the “superior men”. Prisoners who met a good fortune to become swine-herds, ate some portions of excellent food – taken away from their wards – from the pigs.

In the stables where horses were contained, prisoners had some other opportunities. I was invited several times from the wood-work shop into a nearby stable by my friend 31, where I arrived with my tools supposedly to repair something, simulating such necessity to SS-men who chanced to come by. My friend entertained me by a real feast. He gave me a dixieful of black sugar, which, while washed in water, salt flushed off, became nearly white. He added wheat bran to it. Mixed up, I ate it like a most tasteful layer-cake. Then I did not imagine I had eaten before or I would eat in future, even if I succeeded to return to my life in freedom, anything equally tasteful. My friend had also milk, which he poured off out of portions delivered here for a stallion.

Yet you had to watch carefully not to “get in bad books”. It was forbidden just to come here without any reason, without the order of any repair by the capo.

My friend 31 created here the nucleus of a cell, from the staff of the stable. But on 15 May he was released due to efforts done by his mother and he went to Warsaw, carrying my report of my work here.

Much later, my friend 32 placed in the stables supported his exhausted organism, by milking mares in foal and drinking the koumiss.

There was also a tannery, where my friends, taking advantage of the conditions, used to cut off swine leather delivered here for tanning, to diminish them with their basic form being preserved – and cooked an “excellent” soup out of those trimmings. I ate the meat of a little dog delivered to me from the tannery by my friends – unconscious of what animal I was eating (for the first time in summer 1941). Later on, I did this consciously. My instinct and the necessity to preserve my strength made tasteful everything what was possible to be eaten. Some bran, delivered me in secret by my friend 21 who worked at calves – in raw condition, so poorly cleaned that my calves would not eat them before – I added to my soup delivered for us to the woodwork shop, while

considering whether to pour two spoons to my dixie or one only (we were “kommandiert”, we did not go for dinner or the noon roll-call to the camp, we were counted in the woodwork shop). If my friend 21 sometimes succeeded to carry more bran, then I poured a handful right into my mouth and thus, in dry condition, slowly, by small portions, having crumbled them into swallowable condition, I swallowed them together with husk. So it turns out that everything is feasible and everything can be tasteful. Nothing was bad for me, perhaps because my stomach was always very efficient.

I was no professional of carpentry, so I had to make up by shrewdness. Initially I was shirked by my friends (it was impossible for a long time), then I had to face up my carpentry tasks. It was here, where I learned to sharpen tools. Quite natural, in the understanding of all carpenters I must have known that for a long time. Apart from obercapo Balke, there were several capos and several foremen for whom I had to pretend skilfully to be a good carpenter. Instructed by Władek and several other friends I learnt to saw, to plane, to “flat” the arrises of planks to be glued into table tops.

YOU MUST KEEP YOUR EYES OPEN

But the eyes did the most important work. In Oświęcim, in various positions and in various professions, your eyes and ears were working most of all. You had to reach everywhere by your sight, so that any rest of your muscles would fall in a moment when no capo – no “beater” saw that. But when the sight of your supervisor, scrutinising the work posts or figures, would rest on you or if you got into the field of vision even in a corner of his eye – then, my friend, you had to work or to pretend to work skilfully. You could not stand or rest, even if you had worked much in the absence of that master. If you actually had done so, you were thoughtless. Beware! Arbeit macht frei!, it was read several times a day on the gate. You could fly away from here through the chimney if you exhausted your strength. You could be beaten with a stick if you rested in the time when one of your supervisors had a look at you.

Quite a different thing was in case of a first-class professional, who already had his good reputation here. Such one did not need to pretend. Others, be they really carpenters, had to be careful. There were several hundred positions in the shops, while thousands were dying in the camp. New, actual professionals crowded to get into the shop. Muffs were removed – they died in the fields. In this way, out of necessity, I slowly began to be a carpenter. I did acceptable “zinks” then, I polished.

NEW MEMBERS OF THE ORGANISATION

I succeeded to locate under the roof my friends, who came from Warsaw (April-May 1941), whom I recruited into operational work. I located my colleagues 25 and 26 in the “Fahrbereitschaft” commando through our member 33, who governed that commando as if his own one. My colleague 27 – in the hospital as hospital attendant, through doctor 2. Colleague 34 – in the hospital as a clerk, through second lieutenant 4, and so on. I often went to blocks 11 and 12 of “zugangs” (spring 1941, old numbering) where new colleagues were delivered, to look for friends, to choose colleagues for my work, to locate people under the roof, to rescue. Here some day I met the Czetwertyński family: Ludwik – owner of Żołudok and his two sons and his brother of Suchowola. At the same time I met my friend from partisan movement of 1939 – officer-cadett 35. Several days later I also met my two colleagues of my work in Warsaw – 36 and 37.

I observed all of them carefully, as you could not know how your friend would behave, while having passed The Szucha Avenue and Pawiak. Some were exhausted, some were in despair. Not all of them were fit for a new organisational job here, for a new conspiracy. Major 38, who had worked for us in Warsaw under pseudonym “Sęp II”, during our first meeting in the square in Oświęcim (autumn 1941) jumped to me with joy and shouted: “You are here? Gestapo in Warsaw has chopped my a...e in chequered pattern, while asking: where is Witold? Are you here for a

long time? What is your number... How did you do this? Though I saw you two months ago in Warsaw and so I declared in the Szucha Avenue". Not silencing his voice he jabbered in the presence of a dozen or so of my colleagues and he de-conspired me, as my name was Tomasz here. It was good that there were no cads among us. And it was nothing else but a slight dementia after beating in the Szucha Avenue, by which I explained his "how did I do that two months ago I was in Warsaw". It turned out much later that it should have been explained by another reason.

Out of a dozen or so of my old friends who arrived in those months, 25 and 29 were most useful and I trusted them as much as I trusted myself.

“ZUGANGS”

You felt quite strangely in the “zugang” blocks, while standing in a corner of a room and watching those people who had just arrived from the Earth and seemed to have – as you could say – the dust of Warsaw upon them. As if you contained several people inside you. One of them wished to feel rancour against his fate and longing for the Earth unless he was not ashamed of those residuals left in him. Another one was yet stronger and felt in him a joy of his victory over his own whims and small matters unnecessary here, for which people were attached on Earth. The third one with some pity, not in the worse sense of that word, but with a kind of an inner, brotherly judgement, looked with forbearance at those comers who still addressed each other by “Mister...”.

My God, how quickly it must fall off from you... the sooner the better. Here, educated classes were to be done away first of all, because the authorities of the camp were instructed accordingly and because an educated man was not fit to be craftsman in a shop – if he did not manage to get into a reserve for educated people: the construction office, the chancellery, the hospital, the “Effektenkammer” or the “Bekleidungskammer”, he would die here as a piece of useless material. But, sometimes, also because an educated man of scientific wisdom, was a total muff of wordly wisdom. Additionally, his organism was softened, not adapted to physical work and poor food. I am sorry, but to express the truth

about the camp, I cannot omit that question. And the reader may accuse me of an intention to “blacken” the educated classes. I think I have some rights to be placed among the aforesaid, but it does not mean I should not write the bitter truth.

To a large degree, educated people delivered to the camp were muffs in practical respect. They did not know that their scholarly and certificated intellect should be concealed for the time being, as deeply as possible, under the intellect of an energetic mind looking for a way to catch hold on that rocky and vegetation-difficult soil of a concentration camp. Not to address people by official titles but to wrestle with the conditions. Not to demand an employment in an office because you were an engineer or in the hospital because you were a doctor, but to content yourself with any possible “hole” through which you could slip from the “zugang” block to any place, just to get to a work place which the camp authorities deemed important but which did not offend the honour of a Pole. Not to “puff yourself up” that you were barrister, as that profession was absolutely unprofitable here. First of all, be friendly in your relations with any Pole, if he was not a cad, and take advantage of every kindness and repay with kindness. Because you could live here only on mutual binds of friendship or work – while mutually supporting each other. How many did not understand it... How many were such egoists, of whom you could say: the wave does not adhere to him nor he adheres to the wave. Such one must have died. We had too little positions and many people to be rescued. Additionally, there was lack of will not to eat something you were unable to digest, as not all stomachs of our educated men were resistant. “Stupid, sh... d intellectual” – it was the most contemptuous bad name in the camp.

“MUSLIMS”

Since the spring of 1941 the word “muslim” found acceptance in the camp. The Germans in power called in this way a prisoner who was getting done for, weakened and could hardly walk. The term was generally accepted. In some camp verse we said: “... muslims – slightly swayed by winds...” It was a creature just on the brink between life and crematorium chimney. He recovered strength with great difficulty, he mainly ended his life in the hospital or in the “Schonungsblock” (block 14 by old numbering, 19 by new one), where several hundreds of those human shadows gained a favour of the camp authorities: they were allowed to stand in ranks in corridors and do nothing, but that standing also put an end to their lives. Mortality in that block was huge.

45

“OH! UNCLE!”

In July 1941, when in the square I was passing a group of young boys (16-17 years old) transported here from school for singing of patriotic songs, one of them jumped to me and shouted “Oh! Uncle!” A next de-conspiracy. But it gave me pleasure – not that he had been delivered here, of course, but – by news from my loved ones. Several weeks later, in the machine room of the woodwork shop, somebody’s eyes “cut into” my face, scrutinizing me carefully without a twinkle. I withstood the sight. That man, of short size, a Polish prisoner, approached me and asked if I was XY, telling my actual name. I told it was a mistake. But he did not allow me to be deceived and assured I should not fear him. Several weeks later he was sworn and worked for us as 40. He had his work in the woodwork shop, in the machine room.

46

WOODWORK SHOP AGAIN

Also in the woodwork shop I increased our ranks by swearing three brave Poles: 41, 42 and 43. Soon 44, 45 and 46 joined our job.

In the woodwork shop I began to get along somehow, better or worse. By some dispensation of fate, my work and my profile of a sham carpenter did not attract the attention of capos. It was only once, when – as I was alone at my work place – I was adjusting plates to be glued, oberkapo Balke stood several steps behind me and looked at me for a while, of which I was unaware, then he summoned capo Walter and, while pointing at me with his finger, slowly drawling his words, said: “Wer ist das?” But they went on, not breaking my work. My colleagues, by whom the capos were standing, told me about it. Apparently they understood I was not a carpenter.

In general, Balke was an interesting person. A tall one, handsome, intelligent appearance, quite stiff and cold. On Sundays, when we were oppressed by the so-called “blocksperré” until noon, by locking us up in blocks, making various inspections of our dresses, Balke used to come in and to order all carpenters to go out to the square, where he made a call, arranged us by twenties, appointed chiefs of twenties and kept us in the square when it was sunny, the orchestra was playing, and until the “blocksperré” was ended. In the end, he joyfully bid us good-bye, while releasing us to block.

THE “STAMMLAGER” AND ITS BRANCHES: BUNA AND BRZEZINKA

Our camp was expanding continually. Not in the amount of prisoners – there were about 5-6 thousands of them almost all the time. But the serial number reached above 20 thousand – about fifteen thousand had been consumed by the crematorium. The camp was expanding in another way – by construction of buildings. Apart from the eight blocks built on the roll-call square (which effected a change of numbering in the whole camp) and apart from the erection of buildings in the direction of the “Industriehof I” in the main camp (“Stammlager”), branch camps were erected quickly. The first one, so-called Buna eight kilometres east from the camp, where a factory of pseudo-rubber was worked upon, the second branch camp of the main camp was the newly erected camp of Birkenau (Brzezinka), its name derived from a birch wood. That camp was also called Rajsko, which had nothing in common with the village of Rajsko (Birkenau was placed several kilometres to the east, the village of Rajsko – to the south) and that name was given by a mere irony.

In the two branches, during their construction, many people died. Every day, before the morning roll-call, a dozen or so hundreds of prisoners marched off to Buna (they got up much earlier than we did, they returned several hours after we had ended our working day). In Birkenau, huts were just under construction: then they were of wood, maidenly innocent and new. It

was later, when hell scenes began to occur in Brzezinka – Rajsko. Both wood-workers and carpenters were needed for the erection of those huts in the field and in case a larger number of wood-workers were missing, they were at once substituted by carpenters. They worked in the field, in rain, in snow, under the sticks of capos who hurried up with the work, due to a clear order: to erect that hell in Rajsko as quickly as possible.

Our carpenters were to go there... to die.... Balke had to give those carpenters. He did that unwillingly. He was always choosing for a long time. It was a heavy moment for carpenters, but – as it seemed – also for him. Carpenters, who went for the erection of huts in the bare field (in total, a third part of all carpenters went there), mainly died there, got a cold or just ended their life while working. So Balke used to send some worse professionals. He usually gave a scrutinizing look at me, as if he was thinking: to send him or not to send? And somehow he went on, along the line of carpenters who were waiting for their fate, leaving me in the woodwork shop.

RELEASES FROM OŚWIĘCIM

Those released from Oświęcim constituted a minimum fraction. They were mainly colleagues from street round-ups, in Warsaw, who had no cases and were bribed out against sums of money, through various intermediaries busy in this trade, sometimes meeting extortioners and charlatans. Or by families, which had private connections in consulates of foreign countries or even in the Szucha Avenue. In autumn 1940 about 70-80 persons of Warsaw transports were released. During 1941 releases were very rare, literally by several prisoners – in total 41 persons until the autumn 1941. It was only in autumn 1941 when 200 prisoners went to a “freedom” block assigned specially for them, where they passed quarantine before leaving the camp. They had better food, to bring them to an acceptable appearance, they were not beaten, while those who had traces of beating were kept in the hospital until being healed and restored to health, so that they would not carry out a proof of the horrible treatment into the world. But upon a consideration that in November 1941 those arriving to the camp were being given serial numbers above 25.000, what was the weigh of those three hundred released?

Each released prisoner, having put on his civilian clothes put out from bags hanged in the “Effektenkammer”, had to pass, either in a group of released colleagues or alone, through a wooden hut outside the gate (the “Postzensurstelle” was also located here), where he was farewelled by an SS-men who hammered into his

head that it was required to keep silence at freedom about the Oświęcim camp. If somebody asked how it was in Oświęcim, you should reply: “go and see for yourself” (a naive suggestion). If German authorities got to know that some of those released did not hold his tongue, he would be soon placed in Oświęcim again (it was very convincing, and former prisoners of that camp really kept absolute silence at freedom),

The game I began to play in Oświęcim was dangerous. This phrase does not reflect reality – in fact, I had by far exceeded, what was called dangerous by people on the Earth – the mere crossing of the wires upon one’s arrival to the camp was dangerous. So, my job I started here arrested my attention altogether and as it was developing quicker and quicker, in conformity to the plan, that I really began to be afraid not to be bribed out by my family, as was the case with my colleagues, after all I also was not charged by any case and I had arrived here from a street round-up. Then, as I could not de-conspire my job, I wrote to my family that I was really well here, that they should not touch my case, that I wanted to stay here to the end. Fate would decide if I succeeded to be released, etc. In return, I received a message that Janek W. who – when he got to know where I was – was harassed by his conscience and asked everybody: “why did he go there?”. But he was consistent and replied my family, which asked him for help in bribing me out, that there was not money for that.

I found a way by which I could send letter to my family, in Polish. A young friend 46, who would go to work in the town, found a contact with civilian persons by whom I sent two letters to my family. My letters were delivered to the Supreme Headquarters.

Out of my first co-workers of Warsaw, here in Oświęcim, apart from the above-mentioned ones I met Stach 48 in the beginning of 1941, who was sent to quarries and, in summer 1941, Janek 49 whom we succeeded to place in a transport to Dachau, which – in comparison with Oświęcim – was a much better camp.

“AN OLD PRIEST STEPPED FORWARD AND ASKED THE COMMANDER TO SELECT HIM AND TO RELEASE THAT YOUNG ONE FROM PENALTY”

Repeated attempts of escape made the camp authorities to apply collective responsibility and ten prisoners were executed for the escape of one prisoner (since spring 1941). A selection of ten for one escaper was a heavy experience for the camp, especially for the block from which the selection was made. Then we, as an organisation, assumed a clearly negative attitude against escapes. We did not organise any escapes and condemned all such impulses as a symptom of extreme egoism, until a radical change occurred in this respect. For the time being, all escapes were wildcat adventures not connected with our organisation.

Selection for death was done immediately after the roll-call on which the absence of an escaper was fixed. In front of the block, which stood in ten rows and from which the escape was done, the commander of the camp arrived with his suite and coming along the line, waved his hand at a prisoner who pleased him or rather who did not please.. An “inspected” row did five steps of “forward march” and the suite walked along a next one. From some rows several people were selected, from others – nobody. It was best to look death in the face – such one was generally not selected. Not all were able to keep their nerves and sometimes somebody behind the back of the commission run forward, into the already inspected row – mainly he was noticed and taken to death. One

time an event occurred that upon selection of a young prisoner, an old priest stepped forward and asked the commander of the camp to select him and to release that young one from penalty. The block got petrified out of impression. The commander agreed. The hero priest went to death, while that prisoner returned to the rank.

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“THE CAMP AUTHORITIES HAD SPECIAL DELIGHT, WHEN THEY COLLECTED A LARGER GROUP OF POLES FOR EXECUTIONS BY FIRING ON DAYS, WHICH HAD BEEN CELEBRATED AS NATIONAL HOLIDAYS IN POLAND”

The Political Department was operating, which resulted in executions for cases from the Earth. The camp authorities had special delight, when they collected a larger group of Poles for executions by firing on days, which had been celebrated as national holidays, over there in Poland, on the Earth. As a rule we had a larger executions on 3 May and 11 November, additionally, a group of Poles was executed on 19 March.

51

IN THE SCULPTURE STUDIO. CONSPIRACY.

Sometimes, on Earth, as I longed for creative work with chisel, for sculpture, I often thought, well, I never had time for that and I had to be locked in prison perhaps. My fortune always favoured me in my life; it must have eavesdropped it. I was locked – so I should try to sculpture – but I had no idea of that. There was a sculpture room by the woodwork shop. In fact, only wood-carvers worked there, mainly mountaineers, apart from several painters, university graduates like 44 and 45. With the assistance of 44 and 45 I was accepted to the sculpture studio. My transition was facilitated by the fact that the sculpture studio was a sub-commando of the woodwork shop in which I had been employed for several months.

The chief of the sculpture studio was a really good sort – 52. I arrived there (1 November 1941), made several pictures – designs of paper knives. I was told: “On paper it is beautiful, but transfer it to wood”. So I started my work in this way, having moved to the sculpture studio for good. During the first week I sculptured three knives. The first knife was my training of holding tools in hand and using them, the second one was a bit better, while the third one 52 showed to other sculptors, saying: “Knives shall be sculptured in this way”.

So the work was going on. Next to me on one side there sat always joyful, excellent colleague 42, on the other side – my friend 45. In the morning on 11 November 1941, 42 approached me and

said: "I had a strange dream, I feel I will be »done away«. Perhaps it's a trifle, but I am glad because at least I will die on 11 November." Half an hour later on the morning roll-call his number was read among other numbers. He bid me good-by cordially and asked me to tell his mother he died in a cheerful spirit. Several hours later he was dead.

It resulted from the division of our tasks that news coming from the outer world, regularly received by us in a fixed way, were disseminated in the camp by a cell composed of our three members. One of them, our memorable "Wernyhora" – 50, on all road crossings encircled by a group of prisoners, always uttered optimistic forecasts. He was welcomed and liked by everybody.

The organisation was developing. During my stay in the sculpture shop I recruited several our friends 53 and 54. Then 55, 56, 57 and 58. Apart from recruiting personally by me, each five was expanding, branching off among the mass of prisoners by its own means to various commandos, establishing its branches on the basis of the knowledge of the profile of a new candidate. Everything here was based exclusively on mutual trust. Therefore, while solving the problem of leadership in various mutually interrelated groups, I decided to rely on individual commanders, from junior up to senior ones, taking into consideration exclusively the personal merits of a given leader. I could not solve that otherwise. All suggestions taken from Earth should be rejected. It was of no importance, who he had been in the past, but it was important that each commanding post be taken by a "ballsy" fellow who, in the moment of an action, would be able to win the mass not by his titles, as it was impossible to inform the mass in advance, but previously to keep silence and, when necessary, to take possession of, and to lead the mass consciously. So, he must have had his own profile distinguished by his activities, to be that one whom his colleagues would willingly follow. He must have been not only brave, but also distinguished by his inward strength and tact.

Such a trifle – when people were formed and selected, often such ones were recruited, who occupied some positions. Then a sworn room chief accommodated us by giving additional meals to support the strength of our members who needed to be fed and were sent to him, thus saving some people in his room. But if somebody, who had come to gain a room supervisor, did not know how to behave, had not his tact or his will-power to restrain himself from gaining a dish of additional meal for himself, then our work flashed in the pan.

A different matter, that usually after several conversations with the room supervisor, if the comer had his will-power and did not mention food even if he was famished, the room supervisor took the initiative and the food he received here upon his arrival did not obstruct to put up the organisational network here. Unfortunately, there were several ones who upon arriving to newly gained room supervisors, first of all put forward their dioxies for an additional meal for themselves. In such cases the job could not go smoothly. The room supervisor dealt such visitors with a dish of soup for themselves and that was all.

MASSACRE OF SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR

The outbreak of German-Bolshevik war, apart from a reception of that long awaited information with great joy, did not result in any large changes in the camp, for the time being. Several SS-men went to the front. They were substituted by others, older in age.

As lately as in August (1941) this new war had here, as all other matters, a macabre repercussion. The first Bolshevik prisoners were delivered here, officers only, and locked up in one room of block 13 (block 11 by the new numbering) in the amount of over seven hundred persons, they stood so tightly packed that nobody was able to sit down. The room was sealed (there were no gas chambers in that time).

In the evening, on the same day, there came a group of German military men with officers at the head. The German commission entered the room and, having put on gas masks, threw about several cans of gas, while observing its effect. Fleger colleagues, who on the next removed the dead bodies, told that it was a macabre picture – even for them. People were so packed that they were unable to fall down in the moment of their death. Leaning one against another, they had their hands so interlaced that it was difficult to tear their bodies from one another. They were to be superior ranks only, of various formations, to judge by the uniforms in which they were gassed.

This was the first test of gas here (prussic acid).

Immediately, 19 come to me with that piece of news. He was very perturbed, guided by sharpness of his mind he foresaw that this first test of that kind would be followed by other ones, perhaps applied to prisoners. In that time it seemed improbable.

In the meantime, we had another de-lousing of the camp (summer 1941), after which we were placed, all carpenters, in one block 3, in the first storey. We were given beds, as nearly the whole camp was successively, block by block, being equipped with beds. It was again an occasion for exhibitions of beaters and SS-men. The beds must have been made better than some time in the officer-cadett school – so, vexations, beating and violence again.

Then, (September) part of carpenters (including me) were moved to block 12 (old numbering), while in October to block 25 (new numbering, former no 17). It was here when in a November morning, upon our departure outside the block, a bit trembling with penetrating wind lashing our faces with rain and frozen snow by turn, I was struck by the view which then terrified me. Through a double fence of wire I saw at the distance of 200 steps from me some prisoners arranged in the camp fashion in twenty fives, driven by German soldiers with rifle butts. Whole columns of completely naked people. I counted eight hundreds of them, but the head of the column was already walking to the gate of a building and several hundreds of them might enter there before my departure outside my block. The building they were coming in, was the crematorium. They were Bolsheviks, prisoners of war. Later I got to know there had been over one thousand of them.

The man could be naive until his death... I understood in that time it was intended to give underwear and clothes to those prisoners of war, but why they assigned the premises of the crematorium and some valuable time of that factory, where our colleagues were working in 3 shifts 24 hours a day, still unable to cope with their work of burning the dead bodies of our colleague prisoners. Though it turned out, that they had been driven there just to save time. They were locked up. From the above a can (or two) of gas

was dropped and the trembling bodies were thrown on a grate. Just because they were not in time to prepare rooms in Oświęcim for Bolshevik prisoners of war. They were burnt. After all, there was an order to do them away as soon as possible.

They were in terrible hurry with putting up a fence in our camp, which was cramped, assigning nine blocks for a camp of Bolshevik prisoners of war. It was prepared also an administration – machinery of doing away. It was announced in blocks that who knew Russian, he can be given a position of room supervisor in the camp of prisoners of war. As an organisation, we assumed a contemptuously attitude to that plan and to those who wanted to offer their services for the murder of the prisoners of war, understanding that the authorities wished to do that wicked job with Polish hands.

The fence was done quickly and the Bolshevik camp was ready. On an internal gate erected in the fence that separated our camps, it was hanged a board with huge inscription: “Kriegsgefangenen-lager”. Later it turned out that Germans – capos and SS-men – were murdering the Bolshevik prisoners of war as quickly and efficiently as us, because 11,400 prisoners of war, who were delivered in the end of 1941 (the number given to me from the main chancellery) were done away quickly, during the several months of the winter. An exception was several dozens of prisoners of war who lent themselves to the hideous job of doing away their colleagues and, later, Poles and prisoners of other nationalities in the camp of Birkenau, as well as several hundred of those who lent themselves to proposed subversion job and were dressed in uniforms, trained and fed, to be used as subversives upon their parachuting in the rear of Bolsheviks. Those ones lived in barracks near the town of Oświęcim. The rest was being done away by excessive effort at work, by beating, hunger and frost. Sometimes the prisoners were kept in underwear or stark naked outside the block for hours in the frost, mainly in evenings or in mornings. By this, Germans

laughed that people of Siberia should not fear any cold. We heard the yell of people being frozen to death.

In that time, in our camp a kind of relaxation occurred, doing away of us was less intense, as the whole fury and strength necessary for torture and murder were focused on the Bolshevik camp.

“AFTER A SHORT TIME THE BELL CRACKED”

A rail, which was struck in the beginning of the camp and which emitted the sound of a gong during all roll-calls and assemblies, was replaced by a bell hanged between poles near the kitchen. The bell was delivered here from some church. There was an inscription on it: Jesus, Mary, Joseph. After a short time the bell cracked. Prisoners used to say it did not withstand the scenes of the camp. A next one was delivered. This one also cracked after some time. Then the third one was carried (there were bells in churches still) and was rung cautiously. This one endured till the end.

Yes, the church bell caused many emotions many a time. When we sometimes stood at an evening roll-call, we thought that evening could be beautiful were it not the constant atmosphere of murder soaring upon us. The setting sun was painting the clouds with beautiful colours, when the camp hooter sounded terribly, to let all posts to know that they might not leave the towers of the “great postenkette”, as one or more prisoners were missing on the roll-call. And it ominously forecast us a selection of ten to death or at least standing at attention, at which frost penetrated us through. Or on another occasion, when we stood as an escort of honour to a victim, who blindfold was waiting at the gallows and was to be hanged in a while... when suddenly, in total silence, the mild, quiet sound of the bell came from afar. A bell in some church was rung. How close it was both in heart and in distance,

and at the same time how far and unattainable... Because people were ringing the bell so far away, on the Earth... Over there they lived, prayed, sinned, but of what importance their sins were in comparison to the crimes here?

54

THOSE UNABLE TO WORK

Since the summer of 1941 a custom was introduced, supposedly to regulate the acceptance to HKB. Prisoners who in the morning were so weak that they were unable to go to work, when all (upon the morning bell conveying a message: “Arbeitskommando formieren!”) were running to their work columns – those weak, ill, “muslims”, formed a group in a square before the kitchen. Here they were inspected by flegers and lagerkapos, sometimes by a senior of the camp, who made a test of their physical efficiency and strength by pushing them. Part of them was taken to the hospital, part of them went to the “Schohnungsblock”, while another part, despite their exhaustion, was put into fives for work in the field and sent by a lively march to an inevitable death at work. Those in the “Schonungsblock” and in the hospital usually lived not much longer.

PROGRESS OF THE ORGANISATION. THE FOUR “FIVE”. THE POLITICAL CELL

When I had moved to block 25 (November 1941) I met and became acquainted with my colleague, later my friend, 59. He was a brave and merry fellow. He organised a new, the “four” five, which included then 60 and 61, apart from 59. In that time, among our colleagues, two senior officers: colonel 62 and certificated lieutenant-colonel 63 were delivered to the camp. I proposed colonel 63 to join our organisation and he agreed and became to work with us.

I made the first deviation here because, as I already mentioned, until then I avoided senior officers who were here under their actual names. Because our organisation was expanding, colleagues gave me to understand that I could be suspected of excessive ambitions and as an opportunity arose to settle this question when my friend 59 found colonel 64 who was here under a false name and was reputed a hundred-per-cent civilian, I proposed colonel 64 to stand at the head of our work, and I subordinated myself to him. Colonel 64 agreed to the plan of my previous work, and since then we worked together.

In that time I introduced colleagues 65 and 66 to the organisation, and with the help of 59 – also colleagues 67 and 68, the former of which soon began to be of great advantage to us, as he got the position of “Arbeitsdienst”.

At last I saw the moment of which I could only dream before – we organised a political cell of our organisation, in which there worked very unanimously our colleagues, who on the Earth used to devour each other in parliament: 69 – right, 70 – left, 71 – right, 72 – left, 73 – right, 74 – left, 75 – right, etc. A long row of our former politicians – of party men. So, it was necessary to show a hill of dead bodies day by day to Poles, that they would get reconciled and they would decide that above their differences and hostile positions they had taken against each other on Earth, there is a superior reason – unity and a united front against our common enemy, whom we always had in excess. So, a reason of unity and reason of a united front had always been present, as opposed to what they had done on Earth: ever-lasting mutual pettifogging and mutual devouring in Parliament.

Out of colleagues of colonel 64 I swore 76 and 77, then I recruited 78 and 79.

56

GOOD OBERKAPO KONRAD, WHO LOVED ART.
“THE ARTISTIC COMMANDO”. IN THE TANNERY.

In November 1941 oberkapo Balke left the woodwork shop and was substituted by oberkapo Konrad, well disposed towards Polish carpenters and polite. He loved art, sculpture, wood-carvers – mountaineers. He prevailed upon the authorities to separate all sculpturers with addition of eight best carpenters selected from several hundred of them, professionals in the production of artistic caskets, incrustation and other masterpieces of woodwork. This artistic elite he moved from “Industriehof I” to work on the area of a nearby tannery with a factory chimney, encircled by a wooden fence with four towers of guards. The tannery included on its area many commandos of craftsmen: shops of tailors, shoemakers, ironworkers, painters, smiths, stables with several horses and an “aristocracy” of the fellow craftsmen – the well-off tanners. From artistic units, there was a cell which could be called a real sculpture studio, as our commando with small exceptions was composed of wood-carvers, while here, in that small cell, professor Dunikowski was employed, and together with him, taking care of him, Jacek Machnowski and colleague Fusek. Wicek Gawron was assigned here for a short time.

Every commando had its kapo. All here were kept by the heavy hand of kapo Erik, and his deputy – called kapo Walter.

This set of professionals was supplemented by us, the “sculpture – woodwork – artistic commando”, as our oberkapo of the wood-

work shop wanted to call us. But Konrad did not foresee some dark aspects of our moving to the area of the tannery. Oberkapo Erik was in power here and did not accept any other oberkapos. So, two types of man clashed: Konrad – a true lover of art, but naive and not keeping it secret that he liked Poles, and deceitful, shrewd, wicked Erik, whom even SS-men feared as he had some suspicious collusions with the commander of the camp. He governed in the tannery as if in his private farm, conducted his own management and sometimes entertained the commander, with whom he made profits on tanned leather. And, of course, Konrad lost.

“WAS IT CONCEIVABLE FOR A PRISONER OF
OŚWIĘCIM TO TAKE HOT BATHS?”

Our shops were placed in two rooms of the factory building. Behind several walls, in the proper tannery, there was a pool filled with hot water. The pool was as large that it was possible to swim several meters in it. When one time, by courtesy of my friends from the tannery I was bathing there, I felt as in the past at freedom. For how long my skin had not experienced a hot bath.

All that was done in secret. Was it conceivable for a prisoner of Oświęcim to take hot baths? Could I tell somebody that I had swum? It was incredible!

Some time also Konrad took an opportunity to bathe, not minding he was bathing together with Polish prisoners. Also, nobody feared him, as he had never done any meanness. But some scoundrel espied him and the first “Meldung” was sent against Konrad. In December (1941) we were “kommandiert” in evenings and we worked (not attending evening roll-calls) until 10:00 p.m. We had a lot of work upon toys ordered for children of our German authorities. In an evening, there came one of capos, Erik’s talebearers, accompanied by an SS-man, and induced Konrad for an excursion to the town. Konrad, a prisoner who longed for a companionship of free people, agreed and together with the SS-man in charge of them they three went to the town. After an hour, just before our return from the tannery to the camp, drunk Konrad appeared in the workroom. Just after him some kapo

and an SS-man came in, not those ones who had accompanied Konrad to the town. They witnessed that Konrad stroke the heads of his favoured professionals and said that he should no longer be kapo to such and such one because he was an excellent worker, and he “appointed” several supervisors of tens and several kapos. It sufficed. Konrad was locked in the bunker and remained there for long. In such way Erik got rid of the oberkapo on his area.

Because the question of accommodation of individual prisoners began to be set in order and it was tried to accommodate them in blocks by commandos, therefore I was moved from block 12 – together with a group of prisoners who worked on the area of the “Lederfabrik” or, as it was officially named: “Bekleidungswerkstätte” – to block 25 (of which I already mentioned).

58

MULTI-LEVEL BEDS RECEIVED, AT LAST

Beds, in which blocks were equipped successively, were of wood, multi-level, put one upon another, three beds in the perpendicular. The putting up of beds in rooms had not reached our block yet. We slept on the floor, about 240 of us in the room, terribly packed, which in the camp language was called “tuck” (in respect of legs), on one side only. During the night (as one year before) people traded each others’ heads, bellies, sore legs, while going to the toilet, and could not find any place to sleep upon their return.

BEATEN FOR THE FIRST TIME

It is not very pleasant recollection, but as I am writing everything, I will mention it also. Because of some mismanagement in the camp, in winter (since December 1941) turnip-rooted cabbage was being delivered by railway vans and carried to some heaps located by the railway side-track, 3 kilometres from the camp. Agricultural commandos and other “zugangs” being done away in the field, presented a human material too weak physically, so the strong shop men were taken to that job, while Sundays being assigned for that work. In most cases I avoided this work as I procured, through doctor 2, summons to the hospital for some sham X-ray examinations or probes. But on one Sunday the sun was shining and the day was beautiful. I went together with all. Together with colleague Zygmunt Kostecki I carried the turnip-rooted cabbage by baskets (“Trags”). Capos and SS-men took care that the trags be full, and we were doing accordingly. In one moment, while loading the rest of turnip-rooted cabbage which had been spilt in that place, we took only half of a trag’s content, but as it was the time of return to the barracks and supervisors of tens started to arrange columns, an untercapo who filled our trag decided it was too late to go in another place to supplement our trag and ordered us to go with the content, which was in it. On the square, across which we were carrying, an SS-man stood who saw from a distance that our trag was not full, he ran to us and struck my hands with his stick. We stopped. He attacked

me, shouting – I did not why – “Du polnischer Offizier!”, while striking my head and face with his stick he had in his hand.

Apparently it is due to my nerves, but in such situations I have a grimace (I had several of them), some kind of a smile, which made him mad, so he repeated his blows with his stick upon my head, and stronger. It lasted, I suppose, for a short time, but many thoughts might go through one's head in such moments. It entered my head: XY... impossible to kill him off even with a stick- a saying, which had circulated since one of uprisings... and I smiled really. The SS-man took a look and drawled: “Du lachender Teufel”. I do not know what could happen later, had it not the hooter in the camp, which turned his attention in another direction: somebody was escaping. My colleagues told me later that I was lucky. But my head and face was swelled for two weeks.

BEATEN FOR THE SECOND TIME

I was beaten for the second time much later, in the tannery. Colleagues were smoking cigarettes in the toilet, smoking at work was not allowed. Kapo Walter burst in, like a tiger. I was not smoking but I was just going out. He jumped to me: “Who smoked?!”. I kept silence and had some unintentional smile on my face. – Was? Gefällt es dir nicht?! – I did not know, by which he thought that I disliked it or liked it. Walter was a madcap, who could overturn a man with one blow. Then I got many blows on my head and several times I was on the ground. Yet I stood up in front of him – as I was told by 59 and 61 – again and again with my grimace of smile on my face. At last Walter abandoned me, because the commander of the camp had just arrived and Erik was not in place.

MY MILITARY PROMOTION

Parallel, on the Earth – far off in Warsaw – I was promoted. For the organisation of TAP, for my work upon the unification of KZN, for abandonment of my personal ambitions and, since the authorisation of General Sikorski, for my aim to subordinate all units to ZWZ, what was the first reason of discord with 82 and, who knows, if not just that reason for which I was sent outside Warsaw. And yet Janek filed a motion and, as “Bohdan” declared, 85 was in charge of my case and told him he was more keen on my promotion than on his own. Colonel “Grot” promoted several of us from KZN. 82 and 85 became lieutenant-colonels. In such way I, at last under my own name, became lieutenants (in this way I in practice I went back to 1935). If all that matters did not seem to be too small for me, there in hell, they would have been bitter.

“GOOD” POSITIONS: MUSICIAN, HAIRDRESSER

Regarding good positions in Oświęcim, after flegers (hospital attendants) not for people but for pigs (the so-called “Tierpflegerach”) and after musicians who, in addition to their playing in the orchestra, for the most part took positions of room supervisors, another good position was the work of a hairdresser. Mostly, it was tried to combine those two functions – of shaving and of room supervising. But even if a hairdresser was not a room supervisor, he did quite well. There were some hairdressers who shaved only SS-men; additionally, each block had several hairdressers whose work was to shave the whole block each week. Hair cutting and shaving was obligatory for prisoners, but that work was done by hairdressers. For failure to shave a prisoner or for too long hairs on one’s head, the room and block supervisors were responsible. Hairdressers had a more than sufficient quantity of food, from the block supervisor, from capos and room supervisors who lived in the given block.

63

ANOTHER “TRANSPORT OF THOSE SENT HERE TO BE DONE AWAY QUICKLY – OF POLES”

In some evening in December (1941) we stood with colonel 1 and doctor 2 near block 21 (new numbering) talking and we were shocked by the view of a unit of people coming out naked from block 26 (new numbering), who were intensely vaporising. It was a transport of those sent here to be done away quickly – of Poles. There were more or less hundred of them. After an application of hot shower (in which they willingly washed in hot water and did not apprehend anything) they were left naked in the snow and frost and kept in such a way. We already had to return to our blocks while they were still freezing. A suppressed groan or rather animal yelp. They were kept in such way for several hours.

DEATH REGISTER INNOVATION: “TO ADD 50
NUMBERS A DAY...”

When a more number of prisoners was done away in that way or another, or executed together, the HKB received a list of their numbers and was obliged – upon the delivery of a list of those who had died on that day in the hospital, to the main chancellery – to add 50 numbers a day from the former list as those who died of heart diseases, tuberculosis or another “natural” disease.

65

OUR CHRISTMAS TREE WITH THE WHITE EAGLE HIDDEN INSIDE

The year 1941 came to an end. It came the second Christmas Eve in the camp as well as the second parcel from home – a parcel of clothes, as there were no food parcels then. In block 25, where the block supervisor was well disposed to our work, in room 7, when 59 was chief there, we made a Christmas tree with Polish White Eagle hidden inside it. The room was decorated with really good taste by 44 and 45, with my small contribution.

In the Christmas Eve there were speeches of several members of our political cell. Was it possible for Dubois to listen Rybarski with pleasure on the Earth and after that to cordially shake his hand, and vice versa? How affecting picture of concord it would be in the past in Poland, and how impossible over there. And here, in a room in Oświęcim, they both made their speeches in peace. What a metamorphosis...

66

MORTALITY: "THERE REMAINED SIX OF US FROM OUR HUNDRED"

Through one volksdeutche, a Silesian who worked for us as 81, I was informed of a new action of the political department, which could seriously threaten me. We – old numbers – were very few. This was especially visible at a payment of money. Money, sent to us by our families, was paid out on monthly basis: 30 marks one time or 15 marks two times. If sent in a higher sum – they remained on an account. Later the payment was increased up to 40 marks a month.

Money could be spent in the camp canteen, where everything harmful for the organism was bought: cigarettes, saccharine, mustard, sometimes vinegar salads (pickles). All had to queue, for reasons of order, in the sequence of their numbers. Several times, all prisoners were gathered together, including those ones who did not receive any money, to sign up their accounts. It was then, when it was easy to count people who stood in the sequence from the lowest number up to the highest one, and to get to know how many out of a hundred were still alive. Devastation in the hundreds was huge, especially in Warsaw transports, Perhaps because that the initial transports before us had taken up positions under the roof, so we were done away outdoors. Perhaps because people of Warsaw, as Silesians say, are not resistant. Perhaps because others had more favours of the camp authorities than we had. Suffice to say that some hundreds of Warsaw transports counted two

people each, there remained six of us from our hundred. There were hundreds with a relatively high number of eight people still alive, but there were hundreds represented by nobody.

THE SECOND INQUIRY

It was then that the political department conceived an idea to examine the public register data of all who were still alive, what was easy due to an insignificant amount of us, the old numbers. What if somebody was hidden here under a false name, as, for instance, I was? To spot out such “birds”, the political department sent letters to relevant parishes, demanding for excerpts of public register data for individual prisoners. The letters were addressed to those parishes, in which prisoners had been born or which they had specified in their statements upon examinations.

To imagine what my situation was, it is necessary to go back to Warsaw 1940. Our community very willingly came to help to conspiracy men, especially in the initial period, not yet terrified by macabre advertising of concentration camps and that of the Szucha Avenue. Later it was more difficult to get rooms. But in the beginning, respectable Polish families willingly gave their work and their rooms for conspiracy purpose. In the initial period I had several quarters and several identity cards for various names, registered in various flats. Then it was possible, while going out to the street, to leave one's identity card in the flat. So I had not my identity cards with me, and in case I would be apprehended in the street, I would give such name and indicate such flat which was “most clean” and in which I had one of my identity cards.

One of the flats I used to work in, was the flat of Mrs 83. Some day that lady told me she had an identity card obtained for the

real name one of our officer 84 who had already departed to work in another region before that identity card was procured. Because the card was accompanied by a work certificate, I agreed to the proposal of Mrs 83, to use that card with a changed photograph.

When I was going to the street round-up, I took that identity card with me, because I thought the name was, as it justly seemed to me, not yet disclosed. So I had the identity card of a man who lived somewhere at freedom. But the card contained no indication of the given name and the maiden name of the mother. When we were examined in the night in Oświęcim, just upon our arrival to the camp, I gave a fictitious given name and surname of my mother, as I had to give some. So, the situation was uncertain.

When it is the turn of my number, and it will be in several months certainly, and the political department sends a demand to the parish in locality Z for an excerpt of my data from the public register, while in fact those ones of Mr 84 – then the first and maiden names will not correspond with the data given by me. So I will be summoned again, asked who I am, and that will be the end.

By a happy coincidence, my colleagues of the round-up, about several hundreds (as I mentioned above), were quarantine and were to depart to Warsaw soon. Through my colleague 14 to be released I sent a message to my sister-in-law, Mrs E.O., with information what surname and maiden name of my mother I had given here.

At that time many colleagues departed, some of them workers of our organisation, apart from 14, 9 departed also. At the same time colonel 1 went to the freedom block, he was released due to efforts of his university colleague in Berlin, who today occupies a higher position in the German army. Through colonel 1 I sent a report to Warsaw, of the work of the organisation here. Through colleague 86 who was here for that his name was identical as the name of one of colonels, I sent out some information.

“SEIDLER’S WEEK”

To supplement the picture of the camp at that time (of course, of those things I saw personally, as I am not able to describe everything which I heard from my colleagues who worked in other commandos), the “Seidler’s week” shall be added. In December (1941) we had, during one week each evening, the rules of Seidler on the roll-calls, a prominent sadist who was deputy of the Lagerführer. It was a week of exceptionally nasty weather. Wind and rain with frozen snow penetrated us with wet and cold, it seemed, not only our clothes but our bodies. They were freezing us through. In evenings, it was pretty big frost.

Seidler decided to use it also to do for as many human beings – prisoners, as possible. Each day, since the moment of the gong for an evening roll-call, 15 minutes before 6:00 p.m., we stood, fighting against frost, in wet clothes, until 9:00 p.m., released from standing at attention just before the sleep-time gong. Then we quickly swallowed a cold dinner, which in that time was given in the evening and, in a hurry to settle our necessities, we went to bed.

Those standings continued for a week, as supposedly each day somebody was missing on the roll-call, which of course was fabricated by Seidler. It was so, because it was ended parallel to the end of his function of reception of reports from Palitsch.

But we paid the cost of many our strength (and, by those weaker – lives) in that week.

Notices of death were sent out to families by the main chancellery only upon a clear order of the political department, as for German police authorities it was not always convenient to send an information of a prisoner's death, which oozed out at freedom. It was so, because an inquiry of some other case might be under way, when they held in check some other persons somewhere in a prison, by that they had prisoner X in hand, who was telling "the whole truth".

Part III

1942

“THE MOST MONSTROUS” YEAR

So the year 1941 was ended. The year 1942 began. In relation to the Oświęcim camp – the most monstrous one, in relation to our organisation in the camp – the most interesting, the one in which we reached our best achievements.

... and so happens that due to lack of time before a new decision I must write nearly in a telegraphic style.

“CHANGE OF ATTITUDE TOWARDS JEWS”

A substantial change of attitude towards Jews occurred suddenly. To the surprise of everywhere, the rest of Jews was withdrawn from SK and together with arriving Jews – the “zugangs”, was located in good conditions at work under the roof in the hosiery, potato shop, vegetable shop. They even put on side towards us. They did not suspect there was a monstrous, insidious idea. The question was that in their letters to their families, in which they wrote for several months that they worked in shops and they did very well. What matter that those shops were placed in Oświęcim. What was the meaning of that unknown town name to Jews in France, Bohemia, the Netherlands, Greece, where those letters were going. After all, even Poles in Poland knew little about Oświęcim and at that time they showed a very naive attitude to one's stay in Oświęcim. Our, that is Polish Jews, were done away mainly in Treblinka and Majdanek. Here, to Oświęcim, Jews were collected from nearly the whole Europe.

After several months of writing letters about good conditions they lived in, the Jews were abruptly taken away from their positions and soon “done away”. In the meantime, transports were arriving, thousands of people every day, of Jews from the whole Europe, directed at once to Birkenau where the erection of huts of the camp (such one as erected in its initial phase) had already been finished.

PRIESTS

Also, for a long time the attitude towards priests had changed, but for another reason. By some influence of the Vatican, achieved by allied Italy on the authorities of the Reich, priests were transported to Dachau. For the first time in the beginning of 1941, the second transport of priests from Oświęcim to Dachau occurred in July 1942. In Dachau, it was told that priests had quite bearable existence if compared to the conditions here. Between those two transports I became acquainted with several brave priests, among others with priest 87 who was the chaplain of our organisation.

We had our divine services and confessions conspired against undesirable eyes. We received hosts from priests at freedom, through contacts with population outside the camp.

MURDER OF SOVIET PRISONERS OF WAR CONTINUED

The beginning of 1942 meant a quick doing away of the rest of Bolshevik prisoners. The murder was done in a hurry. Blocks were necessary for another purpose. A new massacre was to be started there. Dead bodies of the Bolsheviks killed at work of road construction, digging of trenches in the area of Birkenau, were carried by carts to roll-calls – several carts, loaded full upon each roll-call. Some of those prisoners just got frozen, as they had no strength to warm themselves at least a bit for their work.

One day at work a mutiny broke out, Bolsheviks attacked SS-men and capos. The mutiny was suppressed in blood, all the unit was shot down. The dead bodies, to make clearance with the authorities on the roll-call, were delivered by several runs of rollwagas.

Having done away all of them (February 1942), except for several hundreds whom I already mentioned, the fence put up between our camp and the camp of war prisoners was quickly pulled down. At the same time a fence was being built in another direction and for another purpose. Ten blocks were being separated from us by a wall made of concrete slabs, for women to be placed inside. This was unprecedented.

HOURS OF WORK

In the beginning of its existence, the camp worked also on Sundays. Later, Sundays were supposedly free, but for a half of the day prisoners were forbidden to leave their blocks (Blocksperrre). Then, to decrease any opportunities of communication, we were deprived of two additional hours. After dinner, since 1:00 p.m. until 3:00 p.m. a prisoner was obliged to undress and to sleep. Block supervisors checked the rooms. Sleeping in blocks were checked by a senior of the camp or by lagerkapo, as a prisoner who did not sleep, spoils his health (horrible irony) necessary for the Third Reich though, so he was a saboteur.

On 18 January 1942, due to lack of place in overcrowded bunkers, 45 prisoners were locked together for the night in the “dark-cell” bunker. After a while, still in the evening, in the basement of block 11 (new numbering) strong blows at the door and calls for the supervising SS-man resounded, to open the door. They were those prisoners who choked due to lack of air, fought with their teeth, fists and legs for an access to the door where some air was flowing in through interstices. After that night there were 21 dead people among 45 locked in – either suffocated or killed in fight. From the rest, who could hardly keep on their legs, 9 were taken to the hospital in agony and 15 went to SK for that they had not been pleased to die in the dark cell. Among them, there was also Konrad, a former oberkapo of the woodwork shop. This horrible scene was witnessed all the night by kapo “Johnny” who in

that time was serving a punishment in a standing cell, for some scheming with Poles as the authorities called it.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY ABOLISHED

In February 1942 a letter came to the political department from party authorities in Berlin, to forbid collective responsibility and executions of ten prisoners for one escaper – it was said that as a result of the same repressions applied somewhere in camps for Germans. In that time an order was read officially, to forbid beating of prisoners (it is interesting, was it due to our reports?). Since that time there were no great repressions against others for escapes of prisoners. So, opportunities to escape reappeared, and we as an organisation began to prepare an organised escape and to send a report to Warsaw by it.

SIBERIAN TYPHUS

The Bolsheviks left louses and terrible Siberian typhus, from which our colleagues began to suffer in mass. The typhus took the camp and was making a huge devastation. The authorities rubbed their hands, quietly contemplating that ally in doing prisoners away.

Then we began, in HKB laboratory, to rear typhus louses and to set them free upon overcoats of SS-men, during each report and inspections of our blocks.

DENUNCIATION MAILBOXES

In block 15 a mail box was hanged outdoor and it was announced in all blocks that letters should be dropped into that box – signed or not – all denunciations of conversations eavesdropped in blocks. For a denunciation important for the camp authorities, the prisoner was to be awarded. They wanted to become protected against the activity of our organisation. Anonymous letters and denunciations showered. Then we, though captain 88 had opened the box in the evening and perused the dropped reports, before Palitch opened it at 10:00 p.m. We destroyed the dangerous, inconvenient reports and we dropped our reports against harmful individuals. A paper fight was started.

ORDERED TO SING GERMAN SONGS

In blocks and in the march to our work places we were ordered to sing German songs. Several times the whole camp had to sing during an assembly for the roll-call.

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ERECTION OF GAS CHAMBERS

In Brzezinka, gas chambers were being erected in all haste. Some of them were already finished.

COLONEL 62

That thing, which I had feared in the past – an introduction of officers into the organisation under their actual names, was justified, because in case of any suspicions that an organisation was present here, they would start from officers who present in place. One day, they took colonel 62 and locked him in the prison bunker. He was led each day for inquiry to the political department, from where he returned pale-faced and staggering. Then I was in fear of various complications. After more than two weeks, colonel 62 approached me when I was with my colleague 59 and said: “Well, congratulate me, I was released. They asked if there was any organisation in the camp.” Bidding me good-bye, as a sleep-time gong was sounding, he said: “Don’t fear, I didn’t say a word. I will tell you tomorrow.” But tomorrow colonel 62 was taken away and sent to Rajsko, apparently so that he could not tell us anything.

Colonel 62 was brave.

CZECH PRISONERS

Over one hundred Czechs were delivered. They were educated men only – the “Sokół” organisation. They were placed in our room (block 25, room 7). They were done away at high rate. I entered in organisational contact with their representative 89 (he is alive and he is in Prague).

Upon agreement with colonel 64, I show my friend, whom I trusted much, lieutenant 29, all our cells in the camp. I do it in case of some misfortune with me. Lieutenant 29 reports to colonel 64 that we visited 42 cells.

Some day, from the base camp Auschwitz I, a number of Silesians (70-80) is moved to Birkenau (a rumour was spread that to be done away), among them my friend 45. Since the preceding evening he was disturbed, as he apprehended something he trembled all over his body in the night. He asked me to deliver information of him to his wife and his small son, Dyzma. He did not return from Rajsko. All the Silesians from that group were done away there. Some of them had been here from the beginning of the camp and they thought that they would survive. Since that time, Silesians who remained in the camp began to be decidedly inclined to work against Germans.

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BLOODY ALOIS AGAIN: “WHAT? ARE YOU STILL ALIVE?”

Some morning, while visiting colleagues of my work, I was in block 5 (new numbering) and running quickly to the rol-call along a then empty corridor, I faced the “Bloody Alois”, who recognized me, although more than one year had passed. He stopped and cried with some surprise and at the same time with joy incomprehensible for me: “Was? Du lebst noch?”, he grasped my hand and shook it. What should I do? I did not tear myself free. Strange man he was. Out of the blood-thirsty fellows of the initial times, to which he belonged also, several were already dead.

POTYOMKIN-STYLE INSPECTIONS OF THE CAMP

The camp authorities, before some commissions visiting the camp (which included some men in civilian clothes) wanted to show the camp in as good light as possible. They were led to new blocks and only there, where beds were in place. The kitchen cooked a good dinner on such a day. The orchestra played beautifully. Only commandos strong and in good health, as well as shop men returned after work to the camp. The rest of commandos – the “zugangs” and others of lamentable appearance – were waiting in the field for the departure of a commission, which had a quite pleasant impression of the camp. The need to show the camp from a better side forced the authorities to move some butchers of the initial months, especially those unpopular, into another camp, among them Krankenmann and Sigrud. Upon loading them into railway vans, the SS-men who supervised the work of prisoners in that station, gave prisoners to understand they had nothing against a revenge of prisoners on them. The prisoners did not need more. They invaded the vans and hanged Krankenmann and Sigrud on their own belts. The SS-man in that time – turned away to another side – did not interfered. In this way the butchers died.

Each witness of murders sanctioned by the camp authorities was inconvenient, even if he was a German capo. So those two were witnesses no more.

THE CONSPIRACY ORGANISATION

The organisation was constantly expanding. Together with colleague 59 we achieved the joining of colonel 23, lieutenant-colonel 24 and new men 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95. Our wonderful man 44 took care of many colleagues, he also gave me his food, as he himself earned on portraying somebody of the authorities and for that he received food for himself.

A transport from Warsaw (March 1942) again delivered many my friends and news of what was on at our place. Major 85 came, most honourable fellow 96 who set up a record of beating in the Szucha Avenue and in Pawiak. They informed me that colonel 1 was arrested again and placed in Pawiak. It was colonel 1 who sent colleague 96 to me. I placed him through colleague 97, who had just joined our work, in his commando.

Parallel we were developing in two other directions, by recruiting 98 and 99 in the construction office and 100 and 101 in the hospital. In that time professor 69 died.

As upon two huge pillars, our organisation was supported upon two institutions: the HKB and Arbeitsdienst. When it was necessary to save somebody of our men from a transportation and to put him under the roof, or to take somebody out of a commando where he began to go into bad books or where some scoundrel was keeping his eye upon him, or a new fragment of work was to be introduced to some commando, then we went to doctor 2 and said: "Dziunek, number... will come to you tomorrow, you

shall accept him to the hospital for some time.” It was settled also through doctor 102. When it had already occurred and when in the understanding of a capo the prisoner was doomed after all, as very few returned from the hospital, then we went to 68 and said: “Give a note for no... to commando X”, or sometimes, with positive result, to 103, and the matter was settled.

In this way we prepared the escape of 25 and 44. Both of them were first-class people and both of them were here for weapon. Their cases were proved and they would be executed for sure. The question was how quickly Grabner’s eye would run upon their cases. By some wonder, both of them were still alive. 44 painted portraits of SS-men and – perhaps therefore – his case was laid aside. But it could not last for a long time.

In the way I described above, in February 1942 we transferred 25 to the “Harmensee” commando – that of fish ponds several kilometres from the camp, where prisoners worked with fish and lived there. Much later, 44 went there and on that day when he arrived with a message for 25 from me, not to wait for me but to flee, both of them “bolted” away. They escaped from a small house by a window, carrying my report to Warsaw.

In the kingdom of Erich Grönke, the tannery, the commando of sculptures and chosen carpenters was in crisis. Tadek Myszkowski who substituted a capo, was in a difficult situation. The mild sight of Konrad who delighted the beauty of art, was replaced by malicious and penetrating sight of a wildcat Erich. Soon, desiring to destroy what had been created by Konrad and calling the existence of the sculpture studio a luxury, Erich dissolved the sculpture studio and ordered us to make spoons. And he gave us the “scooter” capo, a malicious idiot. He ordered carpenters, who had been employed in production of artistic caskets, to make cupboards and trivial things. In the spoon shop we made 5 spoons a day, later 7 and at last 12.

The former member of parliament, 104, worked there in that time. Then I recruited to the organisation colleagues 105, 106 and

107 – a former soldier of my partisan unit (of 1939) – 108 and second lieutenant 109, 110, 111. Out of those who painted toys made by us, where (shortly before a bunker) colonel 62 worked, officer-cadett 62 joined our organisation, recommended by released captain 8.

We penetrated all commandos, but we were unable to get to one of them. At last, in February (1942), when I was “kommandiert” and I returned lately to the camp, upon my return to the block I was informed by 61 that 68 had come. The “Funkstelle” needed two cartographers – draughtsmen of maps. 61 gave his number and that of our former commodore 113. After several days it turned out that the commodor’s hand is unsteady, so we moved him to SS-men’s potato shop where he had good food secured and I contrived to get to his place in the “Funkstelle” (in agreement with 52 of the wood-carvers’ shop).

We worked with 61 with maps for several weeks. In that time – having been informed of the situation thanks to 77 – I succeeded at last in getting from there, where in addition to work of SS-men at the station also some courses were held, some missing lamps and other parts for which we had hunted for long time without result.

CONSPIRACY RADIO TRANSMITTER

Out of replacement spare parts, to which our prisoners had access, after seven months we had our own transmitting radio station which was operated by second lieutenant 4 in a place where SS-men used to go in very reluctantly.

In autumn 1942 a bit too long tongue of one of our colleagues caused us to disassemble our radio station. We transmitted news repeated by other radio stations, about the number of “zugangs” and deaths in the camp, the state and conditions in which prisoners were kept. The authorities went mad, made searches, ripped off floors in shops of the “Industriehof I” and in storerooms. Because we transmitted rarely, at various hours, it was difficult to detect us. At last the authorities gave up their searches in the camp proper and moved them on areas outside the camp, in the region of Oświęcim. They explained the detailed information transmitted from the camp, by contacts with an outside organisation through civilian workers. Searches were done in the Gemeinschaftslager.

CONTACTS THROUGH CIVILIAN POPULATION

But the contact through civilian population really existed. The way to us led through contacts with civilian population (among which there were external members of the organisation) in Brzeszcze and through the Gemeinschaftslager by those who worked for us, being formally our authority. A way led also to Buna though contacts with civilian workers.

In this way I delivered “to freedom” also a file of German code abbreviations taken out from the “Funkstelle”, so called. “Verkehrsabkürzungen”.

MY COLLEAGUE 59. HEINRICH HIMMLER'S
INSPECTION. GERMAN COMMISSION POURED
WITH WATER.

From freedom we received medicines and anti-typhus injections. From one side, doctor 2 worked upon that, from another side – my colleague 59. He was an interesting fellow. He used to do everything “in a cheerful spirit” and he succeeded in everything. He rescued, he fed several colleagues in his room and in the tannery, until he got them recovered so that they were able to take care of themselves. He always sheltered somebody in the tannery. He went to all lengths, bravely, with full impudence, where someone else would melt into thin air. Tall, broad shoulders, bright face and great heart.

Some day, Heinrich Himmler with some commission arrived, while 59 was room supervisor in block 6 (old numbering) and was instructed how to report to Himmler, before whom everybody was shaking. When that solemn moment occurred and Himmler came into the room, 59 stood before him and... said nothing. And then he laughed, and Himmler laughed also. Perhaps he was rescued by that, that Himmler was accompanied by two civilian gentlemen and such mild treatment of a prisoner made him a necessary publicity of his attitude to prisoners

Another time, in the tannery, 59 saw in the yard by the window a commission, which visited shops and was going towards the door through which it was to enter the main hall where tanners

were working, he snatched a rubber hose and, while supposedly cleaning up, pouring water to walls and floor, he poured water purposefully and precisely on the commission composed of German officers. Pretending to be enormously terrified, he threw the hose on the floor, stood at attention... and, again, nothing wrong happened to him.

When columns of prisoners were returning to the camp, perturbed by dark thoughts, then suddenly 59 in a loud voice gave Polish words of command and counted aloud: raz, dwa, trzy...

Surely, he had also some faults, but who has not any of them? Anyway, he always had many friends and supporters around him. He impressed them and he would be able to lead many of them.

RELEASES STOPPED IN MARCH 1942. THE CAMP ORCHESTRA.

The last releases in 1942 were in March, in which several colleagues from the orchestra were released, as the commander who – as I mentioned – liked music, obtained a consent of authorities in Berlin that he would be allowed to release several musicians of the orchestra each year. The orchestra was instructed: whoever would try to play well, he would be released, so the orchestra played beautifully. The commander delighted in the music. But those, who were less necessary in the orchestra, were released each year.

After March, all over the year 1942, there were no releases due to very undesirable presence at freedom of any witnesses of Oświęcim, especially of those of what began to occur in Oświęcim in that year.

CREATION OF WOMEN'S CAMP. GAS CHAMBERS
IN OPERATION. MASSACRE OF POLISH WOMEN.

First women: prostitutes and criminals from German prisons were delivered to Oświęcim. to a part of the camp separated from us by a high wall and they were appointed an educational staff for women who were to be transported here soon, for honest women – “ordinary offenders”.

In Brzezinka, in already finished gas chambers, first mass gassings of people were started.

On 19 March 1942, 120 women, Poles, were delivered. They smiled to prisoners who entered the camp in columns. After an inquiry, or perhaps after some special treatment which nobody was able to specify, in the evening of that day, some corpses cut into pieces, heads, hands, breasts cut off, mutilated dead bodies, were carried by carts to the crematorium.

THE NEW CREMATORIUM: “THREE-MINUTE ELECTRIC COMBUSTION”

The old crematorium was not able to burn dead bodies from our central camp in addition to dead bodies from Rajsko (the chimney erected in 1940 had split and got shattered by continuous vapours out of the dead bodies. A new one was erected). So the dead bodies were buried in wide trenches, with the help of commandos composed of Jews. Two new crematoriums of electric combustion were being erected in a hurry in Birkenau.

Technical specifications were done in the construction office. By words of a colleague from that office, each crematorium had eight stands, two corpses to be put into each stand. Three-minute electric combustion. Plans were sent to Berlin. Upon confirmation, they returned with an order to complete, initially until February the first, then the time limit was prolonged up to March the first – and in March they were ready. Then the factory began to operate at full capacity. An order came to erase all traces of previous murders. So, they began to unearth the dead bodies buried in the trenches, there were tens of thousands of them.

The dead bodies were in decay. Near those great common graves being opened, there was terrible fustiness. Some bodies, buried previously, were then being unearthed while working in gas masks. An amount of work in the whole hell on Earth was huge. New transports were gassed in the rate of over one thousand

victims a day. The dead bodies were burnt in the new crematoriums.

Cranes were engaged to unearth dead bodies, they drove huge iron claws into the decaying corpses. Here and there, some stinky pus was ejected in small fountains. Clusters of corpses torn out of entanglements of dead bodies and extracted manually were carried to huge stacks, which were composed of wood and of remnants of people by turns. Those stacks were set on fire. Sometimes, even gasoline was not stinted to start burning. The stacks were burning day and night for two and half months, disseminating the stench of burnt meat and human bones around Oświęcim.

Commandos engaged for that work were composed exclusively of Jews, who lived for two weeks only. Upon that time limit they were gassed and their bodies were burnt by other Jews, newly arrived and included into work commandos. They did not know then, that they had only two weeks of life left, they hoped to live further.

BEAUTIFUL CHESTNUT AND APPLE TREES WERE
BLOOMING...

Beautiful chestnut and apple trees were blooming... Especially in that time, in spring, our slavery was resented most hardly. When during our march in a column, which kicked up dust over an old road to the tannery, we saw a beautiful sunrise, beautifully rosy flowers in orchards in on trees by the road or when on our return we met young couples walking about and imbibing the charm of the spring, or we met women who quietly perambulated their babies, then a thought was born, rattled somewhere in your head, vanished somewhere and again sought some solution or an answer to the question: "Are we all people?" Both these ones walking among flowers and those ones walking to gas chambers? And also those who marched next to us with bayonets, and also we, the doomed ones for several years?

TRANSPORTS OF WOMEN

First bigger transports of women were delivered and located in fenced blocks (numbers 1 to 10, new numbering). Soon, transports of women began to come in one by one. German, Jew and Polish women were arriving. All of them were put in charge of the staff composed of criminal element – of prostitutes and criminal women. Except for German women, hairs on heads and bodies of all of them were cut. This operation was done by our hairdressers – men. Curiosity of hairdressers who were thirsting for women and a sensation, quickly changed into tiredness due to constantly unsatisfied lust and disgust out of surfeit.

Women were placed in the same conditions as men prisoners. But they did not experience the methods of so quick doing away of people as we did in the first year of the existence of the camp, as also in our place, in the camp for men, methods had changed. But they were done away in the field by rain, cold, work, to which they were not accustomed, by lack of any opportunity to rest and by standing at attention on roll-calls.

Every day we met the same columns of women, we crossed each other on our way in various directions to work. Some figures, heads and nice faces were known by sight. The women initially kept courageous, soon they lost the lustre of their eyes, smile of their lips and vigour of movements. Some of them still kept smiling, but more and more sadly. Their faces turned grey, animal hunger

appeared in their eyes – they became to be “muslims”. We began to notice the absence of known figures in their fives.

Columns of women walking to be done away at work were escorted by pseudo-people dressed in heroic uniforms of German soldiers and a heard of dogs. At work, in the field, a hundred of women were guarded by one “hero” with several dogs. The women were weak and they could only dream of a escape.

A CHANGE OF POLICY: PHENOL INJECTION INSTEAD OF KILLING WITH A SPADE OR STICK

Since the spring of 1942 we were surprised by the view of all “muslims” willingly accepted to HKB, who, by the old custom, used to stand in a group by the kitchen for an inspection. Later nobody stood in a group, all of them went at once to HKB to block 28 (new numbering), where they were willingly accepted without any further ado.

It grew better in the camp – prisoners talked to one another – no beating, you can be accepted to the hospital.

And, indeed, in the hospital, each bed contained several ill persons laid in it, but new ill persons were still willingly accepted. And only SS-man Josef Klehr used to go around and put down the numbers of weaker prisoners. It was thought they would be given an additional portion of food for recovery. Later, the numbers put down were read and those prisoners went to block 20 (new numbering). Soon the same numbers could be seen in the daily stacks of dead bodies laid in front of the hospital (each prisoner accepted to the hospital had his large-size number on his chest, written with indelible pencil, to avoid troubles with post-mortem identification upon the preparation of a long list of those dead and murdered).

They were done away with phenol – it was a new way.

Yes, the picture of Oświęcim was changed radically. Then you could see (at least on the area of the base camp itself) neither

breaking of heads to pieces by a spade, nor killing by knocking down a plank into one's intestines, nor crushing of crushing of the chest of a lying strengthless prisoner; there were no ribs broken by the pressure of the body of degenerated butchers who jumped with their heavy boots upon the chest of a prisoner. At that time, quietly and in silence, prisoners undressed stark naked, numbers, noted down in HKB by a German doctor of SS, stood in the corridor of block 20 (new numbering) and patiently awaited their turn. They came in individually behind a curtain into bath, where they were beaten on a chair. Two butchers wrenched their arms backward, throwing out their chests forward, and Klehr made a phenol injection with a long needle just in their hearts.

In the beginning, an intravenous injection was applied but the delinquent lived on after it too long – for several minutes – so, in order to save time, the system was changed and injection was done straight into the heart, then the prisoner lived for several seconds only. The fluttering half-dead corpse was thrown into a neighbouring room by the wall, and a next number came in. Indeed, this way of murder was much more intelligent but horrible in its coulisse. All those standing in the corridor knew what was in store for them. When going along the row, you could see your acquaintances and you told them “Hello Johnny” or “hello Stan, you today, me perhaps tomorrow”.

They were not exclusively those seriously ill or exhausted. Some were here only because Klehr did not like them and put them down in the “needle list”, there was no way out.

The butchers were also different than in the beginning of the camp; nevertheless I do not know if they may be called degenerates. Klehr used to murder with his needle with great zeal, mad eyes and sadistic smile, he put a stroke on the wall after the killing of each victim. In my times, he brought the list of those killed by him up to the number fourteen thousand and he boasted every day with great delight, like a hunter who told of the trophies of the chase.

A bit less number, that is about four thousand, were done away by prisoner Pańszczyk who volunteered to drive injections in the hearts of his colleagues.

Klehr had an accident. One time, having served all from the injection queue, he as usual came into the room where bodies of the dying prisoners were thrown in, in order to delight in the picture of his daily job, one of the “dead bodies” revived (apparently there was some inaccuracy in the job and he got too little phenol), got up and staggering, walking upon dead bodies of colleagues, swaying like a drunk man, he began to approach Klehr, saying: “Du hast mir zu wenig gegeben – gib mir noch etwas!”

Klehr turned pale but not losing his self-control, he assailed him. Here a mask of the sham culture of the butcher fell off – he put out his revolver and without any shot, as he did not wish to make noise, he did away his victim, beating his head with the butt of his revolver.

Room supervisors in HKB reported every day of those who had died in their rooms. One time an incident occurred (I know at least one, maybe there were more of them) that the room supervisor made a mistake and reported a still living number in place of a really dead one. The report went to the main chancellery. In fear of removal from his position and for the sake of peace, that criminal ordered an ill person, who was a “zugang” unaware what was going on, to get up and to stand in the queue for Klehr’s injection. One man more made no difference to Klehr. In this way, the room supervisor compensated his error as both people, he who died in his room and he who got the needle from Klehr, were dead bodies already. The report was consistent as the number of this one who died in room was added later.

But we had in the hospital many room supervisors who were very good Poles.

RE-NUMBERINGS

Two times there was a change of numbers necessary for us, which was done smoothly and with no harm to anybody. In the time of high mortality out of typhus, when dead bodies were thrown out from several blocks in mass, we rescued two our men introduced to the hospital block, who were charged serious cases, by writing their numbers on dead bodies and giving the numbers of those dead bodies to them, while taking care if cases of those dead ones in the political department were not too serious. We succeeded to place them, equipped with suddenly changed public register data, surnames, names (given by colleagues from the main chancellery) in Birkenau just from the hospital. They were still unknown there, new numbers, zugangs, the case got slurred and it was fully successful.

PLAN OF A MILITARY ACTION

The organisation continued to develop. I suggested to colonel 64 to appoint my friend lieutenant 85 the supreme military commander in case of an action, for whom I had planned such position in the past in the conspiracy of 1940 in Warsaw. Colonel 64 willingly agreed. "Bohdan" knew the site around, sometimes, years before, he had commanded a battery of 5 DAK.

I decided then, what colonel 64 approved, to develop a plan of a possible action depended on tasks to be fulfilled, of which we found four basic ones. It was due to that we had to solve in two ways our plan of getting the camp under control, to which, according to the final task of our work here, we wanted to prepare our organised units. Otherwise if it was a workday, otherwise if in the night or on a holiday when we were in blocks. Also, because then we had not yet lived all by whole commandos in blocks. So, there were other contacts, connections and commanders present at work, while other ones in the blocks. Therefore the plan should be based on an outline of basic actions while in order to execute them, each action should be elaborated separately.

There emerged the need to make appointments for the four positions of commanders. So I proposed colonel 60 to one of them, captain 11 to the second post, second lieutenant 61 to the third post and captain 115 to the fourth post. Lieutenant-colonel 64 and major 85 agreed with us.

At last, with the help of colleague 59 and after some longer talks with strong stress put on the need of unity and the need to persist in silence even if some of us would be placed in the bunker and examined by butchers of the political department, colonel 23 and lieutenant-colonel 24 joined us and became subordinated.

A first-class Pole – Silesian and my colleague 76, worked very efficiently in his section and supplied our ranks with underwear, uniforms, sheets and blankets from his store. He gave employment to many out colleagues, among them a colleague from Warsaw, lieutenant 117 and 39.

Colleague 118 and cavalry sergeant major 119 join our organisation. My old colleague from my Work in Warsaw, doctor 120 comes in a transport from Kraków.

A bomb factory was detected near Kraków. Those people were carried here and done away quickly. Doctor 120 succeeded somehow to wriggle out; he was further transported to another camp.

TO GET RID OF INFORMERS. THE
'VOLKSDEUTCHE'

Sometimes the camp authorities sent their informers to us. Some volksdeutch pretending to be a Pole, who agreed to work for Grabner, wanted to detect something at our place; before or just after his arrival to us he was announced by our colleagues who had some contacts with SS-men. Such a gentleman received croton oil procured by us from the hospital, which was smartly added to his food and soon afterwards his stomach got such disordered that he ran quickly to HKB to get some medicine. There, people forewarned of that scoundrel (and having his number put down), upon his arrival gave him some drops of croton oil in a harmless medicine. After several days he was so weak that he went to HKB again, where he, recumbent, received a supposedly indispensable injection, harmless in itself if not done with a rusty needle.

Two other cases had more flavour of a sensation. In the former one, when such gentleman had already been placed in HKB, his lungs were X-rayed and the picture shown open tuberculosis (it was not a picture of his lungs). On the next day, when Klehr inspected the rooms, it was presented to him as a TBS case. It sufficed; he put down his number. That gentleman was unaware, but when he was led to the needle he began to fling about and to make threats of Grabner. The latter case was nearly identical, but he was a newcomer to the camp and while going to the needle he

knew nothing and made no threats of Grabner to anybody. He was unexpectedly done away with a needle.

Nevertheless, soon afterwards a great rumble arose as Grabner had no reports from them for a long time and, searching where they were, he discovered they had long before gone off in a cloud of smoke and, what was more, that his man, Klehr, had done them away. There was an inquiry in the whole hospital, how it could be that those two gentlemen had been made away so quickly. From that time Klehr, prior to needling away, was obliged to send the list of victims to Grabner, who searched carefully if it contained any of his collaborators.

Thus the Easter came.

DONE AWAY BY TYPHUS

I still lived in block 25, room 7. To compare the state of the room with that of Christmas Eve, it had to be stated that many friends were alive no more. We were terribly done for by typhus. All around were ill. As little as several of us, old friends, held ourselves. Who went for typhus, he returned rarely. But also our little, bred louses were doing their job and typhus broke up also in the barracks of SS-men and an epidemic grew up. Doctors could hardly cope with Siberian typhus, but organisms of SS-men also. The ranks of SS-men suffered more and more losses. They were sent to the hospital in Katowice, where SS-men died in most cases.

TRANSPORTS TO MAUTHAUSEN

In June, a transport from Oświęcim to Mauthausen wet off. Colonel 64 went in that transport (although he could be exempted), as he said, to try an escape on the way (what was not effected). Also, officer-cadett 15, cavalry sergeant-major 119 and second lieutenant 67. Before his departure, colonel 64 advised me to propose colonel 121 to replace him, what I did. Colonel 121 agreed, joined us and we continued our work in concert. Additionally, colonel 122 joined us. In that time colonel 23 and former member of parliament 70 were executed.

After the erection of two initial electric-burning crematoriums, the erection of next two similar ones were started. In that time the former ones were operating at full capacity. While transports were coming in all the time...

Part of prisoners were delivered to us, to the camp, and here they were recorded and numbers were assigned to them, as high as above 40 thousand, but the vast majority went directly to Brzezinka where people were being processed quickly into ash and smoke unrecorded. In the average, about one thousand corpses were burnt per day in that time.

TRANSPORTS OF JEWS FROM ALL OVER EUROPE

Who was going just into the jaws of death, and why?

Jews were going from Bohemia, France, the Netherlands and other countries of Europe. They went alone, unescorted, and only about ten to twenty kilometres from Oświęcim the vans were guarded, and they were delivered to a side-track, to Brzezinka.

Why did they go? I had an opportunity to talk to Jews of France several times and one time with a transport from Poland, which was rare to be met here. It was a transport of Jews from Białystok and Grodno. From what they told me unanimously it might be concluded, that they were arriving due to official announcements in various cities and states under German rule, from which it appeared that only those Jews would live on, who would go to work in the Third Reich. So they went to work in the Third Reich. All the more, they were encouraged by letters written by Jews from Oświęcim and perhaps from other camps, that they worked in good conditions and did well.

They had the right to take a hand luggage – what they were able to carry by themselves. So some of them took two suitcases, in which they tried to carry all their property, having sold their immovables and movables and having purchased some small and valuable things, for instance gold, gold dollars...

Railway transports, which were carrying about one thousand people a day, ended their route in the side-track. Trains were

brought to platforms and their content was unloaded. Interesting, what thoughts were in the heads of SS-men?

There were many women and children in the vans. Sometimes, there were children in cradles. Here all of them were to end their lives collectively.

They were carried like a herd of animals to be slaughtered.

Meanwhile, not apprehending anything and upon an order, the passengers got out to the platform. To avoid troublesome scenes, some relative politeness was kept in relation to them. They were ordered to put their food in one stack, while all their things – in another. It was told the things would be returned. First apprehensions arose by the passengers, whether they would not lose their things, whether they would find their ones, whether their suitcases would not be interchanged....

Then they were divided into groups. Men and boys above 13 went into one group, women with children – into another. Under the pretext of a necessary bathing, they were all ordered to undress in two separate groups, to preserve some appearances of the feeling of shame. Both groups put their clothes into big stacks, supposedly to deliver them to disinfection. Then an anxiety was more visible, whether their clothes would not be lost, whether their underwear would not be interchanged.

Then, in hundreds, women with children separately, men separately, they went into huts which supposedly were baths (while they were gas chambers!). There were windows from the outside only – fictitious, inside there was a wall only. Upon the closure of sealed door, a mass murder was conducted inside.

From a balcony – a gallery, an SS-man in a gas mask dropped gas upon the heads of a crowd gathered under him. Two kinds of gas were used: in cylinders, which broke, or in disc which, having opened an air-tight can and dropped it by an SS-man in rubber gloves, turned into volatile state and filled the gas chamber, killing the gathered people quickly. It lasted several minutes. They waited for ten minutes. Then it was aired, chamber doors opposite to

the platform were opened and commandos composed of Jews carried still warm corpses in wheel-barrows and carts to nearby crematorium where the corpses were burnt quickly.

In that time next hundreds went to the gas chambers. In future, technological improvements were implemented in that slaughter-house for people, upon the implementation of which the process ran more quickly and efficiently.

THE “CANADA”

All what was left by the people: heaps of food, suitcases, clothes, underwear – was basically also to be burnt, but it was mere theory. In practice, underwear and clothes after a disinfection went to the Bekleidungskammer while shoes were matched in pairs in the tannery. Suitcases were transported to the tannery, to be burnt. But from the heaps in Birkenau, as well as on the way to the tannery, SS-men and kapos selected the best things for themselves, saying that Oświęcim became “canada”. That term got acceptance and since that all things, which originated from the gassed people, were called “canada”.

Thus, there was a food “canada”, from which not-ever-seen-before dainties came to to camp: figs, dactyls, lemons, oranges, chocolate, Dutch cheese, butter, sugar, cakes, etc.

Basically, it was not allowed to have anything from the “canada”, the more so to carry it into the camp. Constant searches were done in the gate. Someone guilty of having anything from the “canada” went to the bunker, and in most cases did not return at all. But the level of risk of life in Oświęcim was different from that on the Earth and it was still so high, that it was of no importance to risk one’s life for a trifle of any kind – which gave some joy. Some new psyche moulded here required a little joy, paid by an enormity of risk.

So, people used to carry with them everything of food, which could be grasped in the nearby “canada”. On the way from work to the camp, searches in the gate were passed with some thrill.

Another kind of “canada” was underwear, clothes and boots. Soon, the best underwear often originated in the capital of France, silk shirts as well as drawers and luxury boots could be seen with capos and SS-men. Additionally, soap, best perfumes, safety razors, shaving-brushes and cosmetics for ladies. It is difficult to list here, what a well-off woman or man would like to take with them.

To “organise” anything out of “canada” became a nearly universal desire, and – for some – the essence of a day. SS-men poked about into suitcases and purses in search of money, gold and diamonds. Soon Oświęcim became a source, from which streams of diamonds and gold began to flow. And after some time, gendarmes could be seen in roads, searching everybody, and also stopping military vehicles. SS-men and capos did not have so much smartness as prisoners, who sometimes succeeded to find a diamond in the heel of a boot, in a hollow of a suitcase, of a bag, in toothpaste, in a cream tube, a boot-polish and everywhere where it should be least expected. They did that in secret and only in favourable circumstances, when they could grasp some thing left by the gassed people.

SS-men also kept it secret from one another, but the commander used to come personally to Erik in the tannery where they delivered by cars some suitcases full of already segregated things, valuable things – rings, watches, perfumes, money etc. – so he had turn a blind eye to exploits of other SS-men subordinated to him, as he himself was in fear of an unpleasant report.

Prisoners who had access to any kind of the “canada”, quickly became a privileged class in the camp. They traded with everything, but it shall not be deemed that there was chaos in the camp and, under an influence of gold, any major laxity.

Death – despite a great familiarity with us, was still considered a penalty, so the whole trade was kept strictly secret and it was tried not to disclose anything outwardly.

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BEAUTIFUL JASMINES WERE IN BLOOM...

Beautiful jasmines were in bloom and fragrant, when at that time a first-class fellow, senior uhlan 123 was executed (murdered with a shot at the back of his head). He left in my memory a profile of brave posture and joyful face.

Soon after him, one of my best friends, brave officer of 13th cavalry regiment, lieutenant 29 was executed (murdered in the same way). He bequeathed me an information of the place in which banners of two cavalry regiments (4th and 13th) had been hidden in 1939.

ONE OF ESCAPES: "THEY DROVE AWAY IN THE COMMANDER'S CAR"

I sent again a report to Warsaw, though officer-cadett 112, who, together with three colleagues, assembled a memorable escape from the camp.

Long ago I saw a film "The Ten of Pawiak". I dare say that the escape of the four prisoners from Oświęcim, in the best car in the camp, that of the camp's commander, in disguise in uniforms of SS officers, on the background of the conditions of that hell could be some time a truly excellent subject of a film.

The main guarding post (Hauptwache) presented arms.

Lagerführer Hans Aumeier, riding a horse in a hurry for an evening roll-call, met the car on the way. He saluted them politely, a little astonished why the driver was steering the car into an old railway crossing, then closed. But the car quickly withdrew and crossed the railway in another place.

He laid it on vodka and poor memory of the driver.

They had strong heads – their escape was successful.

The Lagerführer returned to Oświęcim just for the roll-call, when all prisoners stood dressed by blocks. It was here that the scene was played. It was reported to him that four men were missing on the roll-call and, what was worse, that they had driven away in the car of the commander of the camp. It was done the hut of the Blockführerstube. Aumeier nearly went mad, tore his hair from his head, cried aloud that he had met them though.

Then he flung his cap on the floor and... he suddenly laughed aloud.

We had then no repressions, no executions, neither any longer standing at attention. So it was since February 1942.

FOOTBALL AND BOX MARCHES

Football matches were played in 1941 in the roll-call square, then (in 1942), as the square was fully taken by buildings, it was impossible. The only sport, in which representatives of German capos met against Polish prisoners, was boxing matches. As in football, also in boxing, despite differences of food and work, Poles always gave a thrashing to German capos.

It was the only occasion, in boxing, to bash a capo's mug, which a Polish prisoner used to do with full satisfaction, to the general joyful applause of the audience.

There were several quite good boxers among us. I knew closer from his work in the organisation, only 21, who always came off victorious from his matches and bashed the mugs of not a few scoundrels.

UNSUCCESSFUL ESCAPERS. "HUMANITARIAN"
WAYS OF MURDER. COLONEL 62

Prisoners, caught in unsuccessful attempt of escape, were hanged publicly ads ostentatiously. It was always a change for the better, people were not killed by a stick nor transfixed by a plank. Only, having done some time in the bunker, they were hanged on the gallows rolled on wheels to the vicinity of the kitchen, during an evening roll-call, when all prisoners stood in the square. Additionally, they were hanged by those who themselves were to be hanged in next turn by their successors. This was done to their worse torment.

Once, in the course of such hanging of our colleagues, an order was read to us, in which the commander announced that for a good conduct and efficient work, a prisoner might be even released. So, unwise attempts of escape should not be done, as this resulted, as could be seen in that moment, in a shameful death on the gallows.

The order somehow did not wash. No one believed in release. Too many murders our eyes had seen, to release the their owner. Anyway, while read in such a moment it could find its way to the mind of a German only.

With the whole wave of humanitarian ways of murder, aimed to testify the culture of our butchers, also we received transportations of prisoners from hospital blocks to gas, done openly. When as many of them had been accepted to the hospital during several

successive days, that there was no space even when one bed contained three of them and Klehr's appetite for needling had been satisfied while there still remained a crowd in the hospital, then ill prisoners were transported by car to gas chambers in Brzezinka. In the beginning this was done – so to say – with shame, they were transported in the night, late in the evening or early in the morning, so that no one could see them. Later, gradually, when the whole camp had already known of that custom and of the “sick tourists”, the shame was gone and the “sick tourists” would go to gas in broad daylight. Sometimes it was done during roll-call, when reinforced guards and barrels of guns were looking at us coldly. Many prisoners, while going to the gas in a car, cried to his friend recognized in the row: “Hello Johnny, hold out!” He waved his cap, he waved his hand, he was going in cheerful spirit.

All in the camp knew where they were going to. So, why did he rejoice? It can be supposed, he was so fed up with what he had seen and suffered, that he did not expect to see anything worse after his death.

On some day in the camp, colleague 41 ran to me with information that in the rows being carried here from Birkenau for execution, he recognized (saw exactly) colonel 62. Colonel 62, brave officer, was killed.

A REFLECTION

I gave those several dozens pages, on which I outlined scenes of Oświęcim, to my colleagues to read. They told I sometimes repeated myself. It is possible – perhaps due to lack of time to peruse all that once more, but also therefore that huge mill processing people into ash or – as somebody might prefer – a roller, crushing transports of people into pulp, was rotating round one and the same axis, which name was: extermination.

Fragments of individual scenes of the camp, each day anew, over three hundred times a year, on a different day but in a similar way, showed – sporadically or regularly now and again – the same surface of a roll with all details thereof... And if you had a good look for nearly one thousand days, then...If people living on Earth made a minimum effort in reading those pages, one picture would occupy their minds several times, but illuminated from different sides. It may be good that the reader will share our minds, which are as different as two is different from thousand, because we were ordered to look thousand times and no one of us could be bored. There was no time for English spleen there!

But I just want to repeat myself again.

“MUSLIM” WOMEN PRISONERS

It was hard to see columns of women, done for by work, wading through mud. Gray faces, clothes soiled with mud... They are wading, holding up weak muslim women. There are some of them who support others and their own muscles with their strong spirit. There are some eyes, which look boldly in the march, which try to dress up the ranks. I do not know if it was harder to see those ones, who were returning tired in the evening from their work, or those who had a whole day before them and were going to the fields as if to rest and held up their week colleagues.

You could see faces and human figures who could neither fit, nor suite heavy work in the fields. You could see also our peasant women accustomed, as it may have seemed, to hard work, here done away nearly equally with “ladies”.

All women were driven by foot for kilometres to work, in good weather or on rainy days. When the women pressed their little feet in mud, next to them the “heroes” on horseback, with dogs – shouting, smoking – as cowboys, drove a heard of sheep or cattle.

TOWER OF BABEL: THE CAMP BECOMES MULTINATIONAL

We had a mere Tower of Babel in the camp already, colleagues spoke different languages. In addition to Poles, Germans, Bolsheviks, Czechs, several Belgians, Yugoslavians, Bulgarians, also Frenchmen, Dutchmen, several Norwegians and Greeks. I remember that Frenchmen got numbers above forty five thousand. And they got done for quickly, as no one else in the camp. Neither fit for work nor for comradeship. Slim, frail-bodied and foolishly reluctant people.

TRANSPORTS OF JEWS STILL ARRIVE.
ANNIHILATION. SOME OF THEM ALLOWED TO
LIVE A BIT LONGER

From Jewish transports, which were arriving, part of young girls were drawn out by SS-men out of hundreds lined to “bath”, thus saving their lives. Fond of the beauty of a naked body, they picked up several ones a day, those of more attractive figures. If, after several days, a girl was still able to rescue her life, paying with her beauty or some smartness – it sometimes occurred that such one was placed somewhere in the chancellery, the hospital or in commander’s headquarters. But there were few places and many beauties.

In the same way, from hundreds walking to gas, SS-men picked up part of young Jews. They were recorded in usual way. They went to our blocks and to various commandos.

It was again a trick for the rest of Jews in the World.

I already mentioned that for some time Jews were placed for a short time for work under the roof, then they wrote letters and sent them to families, that they were doing well in the camp. But then they wrote parallel with us, that is twice a month, on Sundays.

Now, from time to time, SS-men arrived to blocks where Jews lived, mainly on some weekday (we still wrote our letters on Sundays). Having arrived in evenings, SS-men gathered all Jews who lived in that block and ordered them to sit at one table. They

distributed forms obligatory in the camp, and ordered them to write letters to their families, relatives, and in absence of such, even to their acquaintances. They stood above them and waited until they finished. Then they took the letters away from them and sent them to various countries of Europe. Let us suppose such a Jew wrote he was doing badly... Thus all of them wrote they were doing very well here...

When our Jews in the camp had well fulfilled the task of writing reassuring letters to Jews in various countries, and thus they became an unnecessary burden to the camp, then they were done away as quickly as possible, by sending them to some hard labour in Brezinka, or often directly to SK. In SK – as everywhere – people were done away. There was a Jew there, commonly called: the Strangler. Each day he had several or more of Jews assigned to him to be done for. It depended on the higher or lower number of the total SK.

Those Jews destined for annihilation faced a nasty death from their co-religionist, Jew the Strangler, broad in shoulders. Every half an hour, sometimes more frequently or less frequently depending on the level of crowd in the queue to death, the Strangler ordered a chosen victim to lay down on his back (he personally laid down those reluctant), then he laid the spade shaft on the throat of the lying man, jumped with his legs on the shaft and pressed it down with the full weight of his body. The shaft crushed the throat. The Strangler was swinging, transferring the burden from left to right side. The Jew under the spade was wheezing, kicking, then he died.

He sometimes told his victim not to be in fear – as death was coming quickly.

The SK, the Strangler and Jews assigned to him to be done away, were considered an autonomous sub-commando of death. The proper SK, where Poles prevailed, was living, working and being done away separately, receiving the same death in another way.

AN ESCAPE THAT FAILED

In the summer, many prisoners were suddenly transferred to the SK. It was a command of the political department due to many examined cases, from which it resulted that prisoners' cases on Earth had been proved. Out of my colleagues and members of the organisation in the camp, in the SK in Rajske were placed the following ones: platoon commander 26, lieutenant 27, captain 124 (father) and 125 (son). After some time I received a card sent a bit incautiously from lieutenant 27, which happily was not seized, in which he wrote: "I inform you, as we are to become little clouds only, that we are trying our luck tomorrow, at work... We have few chances. Please bid farewell to my family and tell, if I die, that I fell in action..." On the next day, just before night, an information arrived that on that day, upon the signal to end work in Brzezinka, all SK prisoners together dashed to attempt an escape. Weather it was not well prepared or somebody turned traitor, as all had to be informed, or perhaps conditions were too heavy, suffice to say that SS-men killed always all prisoners, about 70 of them. German capos efficiently helped SS-men in catching and killing prisoners.

It was said that several were left alive. It was also told that about fifteen of them escaped. There were rumours that several of them had swum across the river of Wisła. Nevertheless the news were contradictory. It is yet a fact that three years later I was

informed from Roman G that 125 who was in that bunch (son of my co-worker of Warsaw) avoided death in some way then.

WOMEN'S CAMP. A NEXT MASSACRE OF WOMEN.

We knew that similarly as prisoners of our blocks had for some time suffered of louses, so the women camp, the blocks separated from us by a fence, were much infested by fleas. We did not understand what the reason was, why such differentiation in the sex of prisoners was made by those insects. Later it turned out, that some commandos of the women camp went to work to some flea-infested buildings and carried fleas with them back to blocks. They prevailed widely in good conditions and drove away the previous white residents. Soon afterwards women were moved from our place, from blocks of the main camp, to Birkenau, where they died in terrible conditions. Water was insufficient on blocks, as well as toilets. Some women slept on the ground, as their blocks made of planks had no floors. They waded in ankle-above mud, as there was neither drainage nor pavement. In mornings, hundreds of them stayed on the square, as they had no strength to work. Dejected, senseless sufferers were losing their womanly appearance. Soon they enjoyed a piece of "mercy" from the camp authorities, as they went to gas by hundreds. More than two thousands of those creatures, who had been women in the past, were gassed then.

An innumerable amount of fleas remained in blocks left by the women. Carpenters, who went to those blocks to repair some damages of windows and doors, told about their terrible work in that domain of "black-hair ones", which were jumping in swarms

in the deserted blocks. Hungry as they were, they impetuously assailed the comers and bit their bodies in dots, one by one. Nothing could help. No tying of trouser legs in ankles, or tying of sleeve ends, so the carpenters at once took off their clothes, put them in any flea-safe place and defended their naked bodies by constant keeping away, as animals browsing in the field. But they were jumping upon the floor in swarms and, if look at them with the sun in your eyes, you got an impression of looking at many fountains.

TOILETS AND WATER IN BLOCKS

At that time we had toilets and pretty bathrooms in all blocks. Sewer system, water supply, were present everywhere. Three motor pumps were operated in basements of three blocks, which supplied the whole camp with water. Many prisoners died in the erection of those utilities.

A “zugang” who now arrived to the camp, from the beginning faced conditions different from those in which we had been locked in the past, when we were “done for” by impossibility to wash oneself or to use toilet for a quite while. Also, now there was a guard of order here, of whose position everybody was jealous. He used to sit in the toilet and eat soup, he always had an additional portion and however the place might seem strange for meals, he was indifferent to that. He quietly sat and speeded up prisoners’ actions in the beautiful toilet, with his shout.

Women moved from such conditions, which were in our blocks in 1942, to primitive conditions of Brzezinka, resented it very much.

The women were moved, but the high fence, erected in spring to separate us from the opposite sex remained, in order to disinfect the whole camp. But fleas contrived to cross the fence. Not all of them, but those of more initiative, having overcome the wall in some way, assailed our camp and found here much food here in the blocks.

IN THE SPOON SHOP

In the meantime, the situation in the spoon shop was such that it should be thought of a different work, as many thousands spoons had been made and it might be foreseen that our commando would be dissolved. Then, due to some influence of my friends 111, 19 and 52, I was given a place at a carpenter's workbench among selected carpenters (long before, through Konrad). At now I worked together with carpenter foreman 111 at the same bench, but when 111 and 127 fell ill from typhus in turn, I remained alone at the bench and I was to pretend a professional carpenter, responsible for the operation of the bench.

There was a new capo who, after the death of the lunatic "Scooter" (out of typhus) took the commando of carpenters in the tannery. My position became difficult. I received drawings of ordered furniture, which I had to create of wood for myself. Although I worked for twelve days, working alone at the bench, I must admit I got tired very much. I must not to have got into bad books, but I was no professional. Anyway, I made a folding cupboard and although a first-class master 92 came to my bench to finish it, but for those twelve days I succeeded to pretend a carpenter master before a whimsical but stupid capo, without any mishap. I was not an absolute novice in carpentry (for the rest I had to make up by quick wits), but the arrival of 92 to my bench, which he chose purposefully, I accepted with true joy.

Since then I had more time, which I spent on weaving of a “network” here and on coordinating the moves of our organisation, when I met my friends in the proper tannery or, under the pretext of selection of planks in the shed where planks were stored, I held conferences with 50 and 106 on a pile of new straw mat traces which reached under the roof here. Through interstices in the roof we observed the movements of Erik or commander, as from an excellent observation point.

TYPHUS

Typhus was a malicious nuisance and a de-lousing was done in the barracks of SS-men. In our blocks people fell ill. In our room (the 7th room of the 25th block) every day someone went to hospital, suffering of typhus. In that time we already had one bed for each two of us.

From our bunch, officer-cadett 94 fell ill first, then corporal 91, then 71, then 73 and 95, 111 with whom I slept in one bed, 93, in the end (now it is difficult to remember who went to the hospital after whom) nearly all colleagues passed the hospital. Many of them did not return at all, carried away in a cart full of dead bodies, which went to the crematorium. Every day, several familiar faces could be seen among the dead bodies of prisoners, packed as if wood in the cart.

Until then, typhus did not catch me.

Doctor Z arrived to me and proposed an anti-typhus injection, he received the vaccine "from freedom", in secret. But I had to think over what to do, because if I had already been bitten by typhus louses (it might be supposed, as I slept together with 111, who had fallen ill already, while usually ten to twenty days passed between the bite and the fever), then in such case I must not have applied the vaccine as it could result in death. Nevertheless I was not infected, so I decided to take the vaccine injection.

From our bunch, which used to stand in the head of the block on roll-calls, seven or eight people left out of thirty. The rest

died of typhus. Out of our workers, the following died: the brave “Wernyhora” – 50, and also 53, 54, 58, 71, 73, 91, 94, 126 and my much regretted friend 30. Anyway, may I write of anybody as of the “most regretted” – I regretted all of them. I tried very much to rescue captain 30. He was always joyful, he kept up the spirits of people by his own good humour and a dish of additional food, many people lived around him. Just before the typhus he suddenly got a blood infection, which it was possible to remove quickly: doctor 2 quickly made an operation of his arm and removed the danger. A week later he got typhus, went to block 28, where, while in bed for several days, he invited colleagues to come and eat titbits carried for him from the “canada”. He spoke aloud: “God made it, that good people delivered them, so please eat!” He had a high temperature and despite that he continued to talk, narrated with humour that that he had to live on, that he would go out of Oświęcim even if with his head under his arm, as he passed terrible things in Hamburg and he would meet his Jasia. And so, while talking continually, he fell ill of meningitis. He was transferred to block 20. Punctures were made. He was in good care but it could not help much. He went off from Oświęcim – as piece of chimney smoke.

I have an instruction from him: “Isjago”. Who do not understand, please come to me.

THE CONSPIRACY ORGANISATION

So it was an expenditure of us, but it was also revenue. In that time new colleagues joined the organisation, although some of them had been in the camp for long: 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 134, 135, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 141, 142, 143, 144.

I worked for several weeks in block, not attending the wood-work shop at all, making use of a friendly attitude of block supervisor 80, who had protected me in difficult moments before. He gave me artistic work in the block and motivated it before the authorities by the need of chancellery inscriptions on the books of the block. I painted pictures of the life of the camp: drawing of additional soup by those authorised, an evening inspection of legs accompanied by beating on the stool. From colour paper I made a kind of a cut-out picture, wall-pasted. It came out well, because even when Palitsch one month later came to the block, when I was no more there, he destroyed all pictures, broke glass to pieces and destroyed even the frames, but he ordered to give him my cut-out picture.

“LIFE DE-LOUSING”

A new de-lousing of the camp was started. Some day, between 20 and 25 August 1942, as usually for some time, I did not go to work but staying in the camp I was painting in the block. Suddenly I noticed cars with larger number of SS-men, which arrived to the camp, before the typhus block (block 20, new numbering). The SS-men quickly encircled the block. I admit, when I was looking at that scene I felt cold and then warm round my heart for a while. I thought, among others, of the reason of that invasion of SS-men, but what I saw was also terrible. Ill people were dragged off and packed to trucks. Ill, senseless people and convalescents in nearly good health, such ones who had been ill month before and in that time underwent quarantine – they all together were packed into trucks and carried away by several turns to gas chambers.

All those, who lived in block 20 were carried then, even those in good health who prolonged their stay for rest, except for “flegers”, who were identified by their dress, as for a number of months all the hospital staff wore dresses distinctly different from our ones. They were made of white linen, with a red stripe painted along the back and similar stripe on trousers.

Then doctor 2 rescued many Poles, instructed them to take on, in groups of several people by turns, the white dresses of “flegers” and presented them to SS commission as doctors to attend patients. At last, a remark was made that those hospital attendants were somewhat too numerous. But as real hospital attendants

come out in the end, who were known to the SS-men, the whole action was successful somehow.

I saw a scene, when an SS-man drove two little prisoners into the truck. One eight-year-old boy was asking an SS-man to leave him. He knelt before him on the ground. The SS-man kicked him in his stomach and threw him into the truck like a pup.

All were done away on that day in gas chambers of Brzezinka. And then, for two days the crematorium was burning the prisoners delivered again and again from the camp. Because block 20 was not the last one. Then prisoners were being taken from block 28, then from a wooden hut erected for the duration of typhus epidemic, between blocks 27 and 28. And then prisoners were being taken out of commandos. A commission made inspections and selected prisoners from ordinary blocks, where commandos lived. All those who had swollen legs or some damages of bodies and who made an impression of weak workers were carried off to gas. Also, it was taken in hand the "Schonungsblock" and all "muslims" in the camp, although less numerous due to an inflow of the "canada". Yet those who were "muslims" went to gas for a "de-lousing". From the gas they went off – via the crematorium – as smoke from the chimney.

This new term: "life de-lousing" – found acceptance in the camp.

After transports of people who had come in from freedom to end their lives in the gas, the left heaps of clothes and underwear were also given to gas, hanged in separate chambers for disinfection that is for proper de-lousing. So, any action of putting anything in the sphere of gas, even be it a prisoner, was called "de-lousing"

SECOND ILLNESS: TYPHUS

Several days afterwards, on 30 August, I got a temperature and pains of joints, also my calves ached when pressed. It was nearly all the symptoms of typhus. Only a headache was missing but I had had no headache in my life before and I did not know that feeling. I inherited it, I suppose, from my father who sometimes, astonished, used to say: "What a stupid head must be such one, which has an ache!" Because doctors and colleagues told that there must have been headache with typhus, so I waited for several days. Happily, indebted to block supervisor 80 for an opportunity to remain in the block, I did not go to work. I had a temperature above 39 degrees Celsius and it was hard for me to keep standing on roll-calls. But I did not want to go to HKB, as it was not certain whether the trucks would not come again and carry us to gas. The more so, that the illness, including a necessary quarantine, would last for two months. It was my second heavy illness in Oświęcim. Additionally, during my stay in the camp I had some temperature due to cold several times, at freedom it could be followed by some flu perhaps, but here, due to my strength of will or perhaps a strain of my nerves, I fought my illness and continued to go to work.

But in that time, from day to day, especially in evenings, I felt that the illness did not "pass" and, at all, I had too little strength to walk. I do not know what could be later, were it not the de-lousing, which was decisive as in the previous case. I was weakened by that

temperature which lasted for several days. The de-lousing passed through all blocks and our block was in turn. Despite an evening temperature up to 40 degrees Celsius, I prepared myself for the de-lousing while helping my colleague 111 who had happily returned after typhus. When the block had gone for the de-lousing and only the staff to carry the equipment of the block was left in place and in half an hour all were to go for the de-lousing, then I, due to my great exhaustion (I remember how heavy it was to go for de-lousing with my temperature before), found no strength to do so. It was one way to avoid it: it was necessary to go to the hospital, from where I could be taken to gas.

I hesitated, but doctor 2 arrived and settled all formalities for me in a time contrary to regulations, and placed me in block 28 (in the hospital), by pulling me out of the record of block 25 in the last moment before the roll-call. I had a temperature up to 41 degrees and a serious exhaustion – it was my typhus. But my ache-free head had such an advantage I did not lose consciousness at all. Perhaps the course of my illness was milder due to the vaccine?

SMALL AIR-RAID AND GREAT PANIC AMONG SS-MEN

On the first night I spent in block 28, the first air raid was done – several air-planes lit the camp and two bombs were dropped on Brzezinka. Maybe they wanted to hit the crematorium, but the action was not serious. Yet it had an excellent influence on us. We saw chaos among SS-men. Two “posts” who were in nearby towers, escaped from them in panic, they dashed running along the wires as if they lost their heads. From the barracks, SS-men were running towards our camp in a rough-and-tumble throng, looking for one another mutually. Unfortunately it was a very weak air raid and the only one in Oświęcim, at least in the time I was there.

SECOND ILLNESS CONTINUED

My two-day stay in block 28 was called an “observation time”. Here I was cherished with cordiality and put in good care of my friend 100 who devoted all his free moments to be by my side or to carry a lemon or sugar. Through him I had contact with colleagues of work as well as influence on the progress of the organisation. But my exanthema was so apparent that they had to move me to block 20, of the grim history from before several weeks. While I was in block 28, doctor 2 made an injection after which my temperature dropped from 40 degrees Celsius down to 37 and some. So, when on the next day he came to me with a syringe, I joked that if then it dropped from 37 down to 34 I would probably die, so I could not agree to the injection. My organism responded strongly to all interventions and medicines.

After the recent transportation of all ill persons to gas, block 20 was full again. Every day, dead bodies of those who died of typhus were thrown on carts like logs of wood. I do not remember if I already mentioned that all dead bodies carried to the crematorium were naked, no matter in what way those peoples died – of typhus or another illness, from Klehr’s needle or from Palitsch’s shots.

Here, in the typhus block, having carried off the dead bodies every morning, as soon as at noon and especially in the evening, blue naked corpses were laid in the corridor, stacked one upon another, which made an impression of a butcher’s shop with lean meat.

After my first, quite quarrelsome contact with a colleague who was doctor, after several hours I felt friendliness for him. Full of sacrifice, thinking all the time of ill persons only, all day through, taking care of everybody, he was running, feeding, applying injections, he was doctor 145. The second brave doctor here was good-natured but at the same time vigorous captain doctor 146. Additionally, I was in care of colleague 100 through his friend 101 who was admitted here as a hospital assistant with a syringe or to take a sample of blood for an analysis.

Among the administration of that block, the position of store-keeper was occupied by a member of our organisation, my young friend Edek 57. From him, when I began to recover, I got some additional dinners, bacon and sugar. Kazio 39, in agreement with 76, supplied me with a pillow and blanket from the “canada”.

Until the crises was over, in that great semi-mortuary – where constantly somebody was ruckling in agony next to you, was dying, went off from his bed to fall on the floor, threw his blankets away or talked in fever to his beloved mother, cried, called somebody, did not want to eat or demanded water, in fever tried to jump out of the window, quarrelled with doctor or asked him for something – I was lying and I thought that I had still enough strength to understand all that and to bear it quietly. You could fall ill from the mere impressions, you could also get filled with disgust at such peregrination of man and could have some kind of rancour for the deficiency of human organism, you could abhor the mere state of illness. Therefore an overwhelming desire arouse in me to go out of here, to recover as quickly as possible.

When the crisis was over and it seemed to me I had enough strength to come down the steps, to go to the toilet (until then we used a primitive one, arranged in the room for ill persons), it turned out then I was so weak I had to hold to the wall. It was strange, that going up and down the steps, I not only had no strength to go up, but it was similarly difficult for me to go down. I was regaining my strength, as it seemed to me, at a very slow

pace. During my exhaustion, my colleagues were ready – in case of a possible transportation to gas – to carry me somewhere to the garret and hide.

Several times Klehr went through the rooms and selected candidates “for the needle” with his eyes of a basilisk.

I was acquainted to, and got into our job: 118, 146, 147, 148, 149.

Doctor 145 did his best on the position so proper for him, so it was no need to tie or to change anything. I knew I could count on him every time.

From time to time doctor 2 arrived and carried lemons and tomatoes for me, procured “on the crook” as usually.

I got back on my legs relatively quickly during my quarantine, while going down to the yard I talked to fiends through a grate, which separated the “infected” block. My friend 76 carried information of a branch of the organisation, which he had just tied up, 61 came with a plan to go out to freedom through an underground tunnel excavated from block 28, initiated by 4 and started by 129 and 130; my friend 59 came with a proposal of a unification of our new forces and a division of our whole ones, as well as appointment of permanent commanders of our groups, what was desired also by colonel 121 (as changes took place after the last de-lousing).

PLAN OF THE ORGANISATION

Then I prepared a plan of unification and division in this way:

Because after a general de-lousing the camp authorities placed prisoners in blocks by commandos, so there was no more any need to provide a plan of actions in case of a seizure of the camp, in two ways (i.e. for the time at work and for the time in the blocks, in the camp), so I took blocks as a basis.

Each block was a platoon, i.e. those who lived in that block and belonged to the organisation, despite their previous organisational ties, since then constituted the skeleton of a platoon, which in the moment of the “outbreak” should become as large, as many people they would be able to make to follow them, neutralising at once the pro-German elements.

Block X – prisoners of the first storey and block Xa – those of the second storey, together constituted a company made of two platoons, located in one building, with company commander in place. Several blocks – buildings, constituted a battalion.

I divided the whole of us into four battalions. I proposed – in the meaning of military action – I proposed as so far major 85.

For the commander of the 1st battalion – major 150 (blocks: 15, 17, 18).

For the commander of the 2nd battalion – captain 60 (blocks: 16, 22, 23, 24).

For the commander of the 3rd battalion – captain 114 (blocks 19, 25, kitchen and the hospital staff of blocks 20, 21, 28).

For the commander of the 4th battalion – captain 116 (blocks: 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10).

I restrained myself from organisation of the remaining blocks, as they were either newly manned, like 1,2 or used as a warehouse, like: 3, 26 and 27, or under construction close to the end, like: 12, 13, 14, or a special block 11.

This plan suited colonel 121 and he gave his consent.

Several days later I left the hospital and went to the camp. My quarantine was shortened by acquainted doctors who prepared my (fictitious) pre-dated acceptance to the hospital

IN THE TANNERY. THINGS LEFT BY GASSED
PEOPLE. GOLD

It was the beginning of October 1942. I went to work in five hundreds, as usually – to the tannery, yet not to the carpenters commando, where I had been employed before my illness, but to the tanners' commando (in the proper tannery), for which I was indebted to my friend 59 who introduced me to a new capo of tanners, the “Mummy”, as a tanner who had been ill and now returned to work. In the tannery I worked initially next to colonel 121 with white tanning, then, due to a friendly attitude of 59 and 61 I moved to the drying room where it was warm as a great iron oven was place there, and I pretended a tanner for four months, training myself in the new profession.

The view of the large yard of the tannery changed little. Every day several trucks delivered things left by gassed people, in order to burn them in the large furnace of the tannery. Shoes were not burnt. Vast amounts of various shoes, yellow and black ones, men's and women's and children's shoes of various sizes, were thrown out of a truck each day in great pyramids. A commando was created, engaged in matching shoes in pairs. Other men were busy with burning a heap of suitcases, wallets, handbags, children's perambulators and various toys. Colour wool, which women carried here for needlework, was put aside separately. It was not burnt, whoever could, he hid it and used to make sweaters.

The great furnace equipped with a factory chimney devoured all that – the fuel was free of charge, supplied nearly to the fireplace. Those who fired the furnace, had a chance to rummage in the suitcases a little. Sometimes anybody of the tannery ran up the heap of suitcases in front of the furnace, as it was quite difficult to take anything from the yard due to a possible entry into the field of vision of Erik or Walter. And I saw again, as out of a desire to have gold or precious stones, suitcases, handbags, briefcases were ripped off, boots, creams and soaps were searched through. From papers, only dollars were taken. Banknotes, mainly French francs, were flying throughout the yard, driven by wind like leaves in autumn. Nobody saved them, the more so due to a dangerous search in the gate. They seemed to us to be unnecessary at all. They were used in the toilet only.

The tanners – our colleagues – the aristocracy of all commandos, used to take not less than 50 thousand francs when going to the toilet. It was joked it was not proper to take less – you could be considered a niggard.

It is most difficult to write of oneself. In a degree unknown to me I used to go past gold and precious stones indifferently. Today, as I write about it, on the Earth, I try to analyse it in detail, why? It was rather no one's property, so it was explained by prisoners. Even I do not agree to that explanation. But first of all I was unable to get over my aversion to things in my understanding stained with blood and, apart from that, even if I overcame my feelings, I did not see any sense for what I should do it. Strangely for me, those things lost their value. Indeed – then I was in some period (whether influenced by my experiences or due to requirements of faith, as I was constantly and always a believer), that really a self-satisfaction was more precious for me than a little stone of some sort... Suffice, if I brought myself to take that gold or those diamonds, I would feel to fall down from the height reached by me after so difficult way. Additionally, the first and basic obstacle to search for gold, was a nearly tangible feeling I would do some

great harm to myself. So I felt it in that time and, who knows, if now I would behave otherwise if I was put in a similar situation?

Various colleagues took various attitudes to that. For now, I did not need money but much later when I wanted to escape the camp and money would be useful for the trip, I addressed one prisoner and told him we could go out together and I asked him if he had money, just in case. He replied he would calculate what he had saved and give his answer next day. On the next day he told he had nearly one kilogram of gold. But it so happened that escape with him failed. I escaped just with such prisoners who had not a penny to their names. It is a much later story – in that time I did not intend to go out and I waited for the most interested moment in the camp, towards which all our work was aimed.

“FOR SEVERAL MONTHS WE WERE ABLE TO
SEIZE THE CAMP ALMOST ANY DAY”

For several months we were able to seize the camp almost any day. We were waiting for an order as we understood that without such one, although it would be a beautiful firework and unexpected for the world and for Poland, we could not agree to that, guided only by our hope for which Mr X or Mr Y could succeed to do such things. We must not have agreed to such risk.

But the temptation haunted every day. Nevertheless we understood well that it would be a confirmation of our national faults from before centuries. An essence of ambition, pursuance of private interest, repressions for which could be great in the whole Silesia. The more so, it was difficult to forecast what course the events would follow.

We had still a great hope we could play our part as an organised unit coordinated with a general action. Our messages went there, with an instruction they should be delivered to the supreme commander. In fear of some incautious move somewhere at freedom, all intermediaries should be avoided in the delivery of messages. We were not sure how deeply our higher cells might be penetrated by German intelligence, maybe those at the head of the whole Conspiracy in Poland. There was always some fear that if German intelligence scented the affair, the most active men here in the camp would be done away.

ECHO OF A “PACIFICATION” OF THE LUBLIN
REGION. TRANSPORT OF POLES GASSED IN
BRZEZINKA

In those circumstances an echo of a pacification of the Lublin region came to the camp. Initially, among things to be burnt and some worse worn-out shoes, one day some rustic-type shoes, large and small, then clothes of Polish peasants, prayer-books in Polish and simple rustic rosaries were found.

Then a murmur passed through our “fives”. People gathered in groups. Fists clenched impatiently.

They were things left by our Polish families gassed in the chambers of Brezinka. Upon the pacification of the Lublin region (colleagues of Rajsko told us) the population of several Polish villages was carried here, to gas. So it is in the world and it cannot be helped, when things of people carried here from somewhere abroad were burnt, although it was a monstrous job, also in the tannery, where shoes, suitcases for a number of months were an ominous echo of the crime, but now, when you could see small shoes, a woman’s blouse and among that all also a rosary, our hearts gave a leap out of desire of revenge.

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A MURDER OF POLISH CHILDREN

From those Lublin transports several young boys of 10 up to 14-15 of age were selected. They were separated and let loose to the camp. We thought those boys would be saved. But one day, when a message arrived that some commission was to come to examine the state of the camp, in order to to face any troubles, not to explain to anybody where such young prisoners came from – also perhaps of other reasons – all those boys were needled with phenol on block 20. We had seen many hills of dead bodies in the camp, but that hill of adolescent corpses, about two hundreds of them, acted on us, old prisoners, extremely strongly, vehemently speeding up our heartbeat.

123

“TO SIGN THE VOLKSLISTE”?... “NO! NEVER!
NOBODY WILL BE ABLE TO SPIT UPON MY
POLISH NATIONAL CHARACTER!”

There were several new members in the tannery: 151, 152, 153, 154, 155. Additionally, we created a planning/consultancy cell in our organisation, which included colonels 24, 122, 156.

I often witnessed in Oświęcim some of my colleagues receive letters from home, in which his mother, father or wife adjured him to sign the Volksliste. Initially it concerned such prisoners mainly, who had a surname of German reading or whose mother's surname was German, sometimes some kinship etc.

Later, the authorities gave facilitations, so that in the end no German readings were necessary at all, except for the one desire to erase one's Polish conscious – unless there were some other important reasons. Instead, how often you could see here, in this “hell”, a whole-hearted fellow whose foreign reading of his surname made no obstacle to be worthy of the name of a Pole.

Some of them said with emotion: “Yes. I love my mother, wife or father, but I will not sign the list! I will die here – I know that... My wife writes: Dear Johnny – please sign... No! Never! Nobody will be able to spit upon my Polish national character, be it young but strong!

How many such ones died in Oświęcim.

...a beautiful death, as they kept a redoubt of Polish conscious to the last.

Will all our countrymen of Polish surname at freedom fight for their own Polish national character?

How useful it would be a device to verify Polish conscious, which took various roads in various people, for those several years from the beginning of the war.

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A SELECTION TO DEATH AND A DILEMMA. “A MUTINY WOULD SET OUR RANKS ON FIRE – IT WOULD BE A VIS MAIOR TO UNTIE OUR HANDS. EVERYONE WAS READY FOR DEATH, BUT BEFORE IT WE WOULD INFLICT A BLOODY REPAYMENT ON OUR BUTCHERS”

In the second half of October, our colleagues noticed (41 came with this information) that two capos deemed to be the worst scoundrels (apart from doing prisoners away, they sent denunciations to the political department and to its chief, Grabner) used to go throughout the camp, as if looking for something, and put down the numbers of some prisoners.

One day in the afternoon, when I was going from block 22 by the main road, hurrying to my colleagues in the area of the hospital. I met two capos at block 16.

One of them went with a notebook, the second one approached me with a false smile and asked: “Wo läufst du?” – just to tell something, and indicated my number to the first one, then went off immediately. The first one seemed to hesitate – as they went off I also went my way and thought it was some mistake.

On 28 October 1942 in the morning roll-call, clerks (Schreiber) in various blocks began to summon some numbers of prisoners and told them they should go to the “Erkennungsdienst” for a verification of photographs.

In total, two hundred forty and several people were summoned – exclusively Poles – as we found out later, mainly of the Lublin region, including one fourth of Poles who had nothing in common with the Lublin transports, and were carried initially to block 3, which itself aroused our suspicions why not to block 26 at once, where the “Erkennungsdienst” was located – the sham reason of the summon.

We were called by a bell to our “Arbeitskommando” and then we went outside the camp as usually, each commando bound for its work place.

At work, our colleagues in all commandos were seething – we did not know then if they were in some danger.

Later, news was spread that they were to be executed. Two hundred and forty fellows – mainly evident inhabitants of the Lublin region, to whom some numbers of those whose activity, energy was evident, were added – apparently having selected them from all over the camp through Grabner’s “curs”.

We did not even get to know by what they were guided, maybe the mere “sweet will” of the two scoundrels was decisive.

Yet it was called a “pacification of the Lublin region”, which re-echoed in such way in the camp.

In their ranks there was brave 41 (from Warsaw) who ran as first with the news of the numbers being noted.

Then we did not know if they would be executed – we thought it might be a piece of gossip only.

Such high number of prisoners had not been executed at once so far. We were tired by our mask of sham passiveness, when we were ready – we desired an action. We, in the head of the organisation, were nearly biting our fingers while preparing, just in case, for a show-down.

If a mutiny and resistance broke out among those ones, we all would enter the action.

A mutiny would set our ranks on fire – it would be a vis maior to untie our hands.

On the way to the camp, our five hundreds of shop men in good health used to pass the construction office and a reserve store of weapon located underneath.

Anyway, it was not difficult then – our boys were all seething. Everyone was ready for death, but before it we would inflict a bloody repayment on our butchers. Those ten paltry towers and those twelve “gemeine” of the main guard post, who wore their rifles hanged on belts, accustomed to our quite, and took them in hand just before the camp in fear of the authorities.

May the one word fly from Warsaw: GRANTED, and as soon as today, to rescue those ones.

Yes, it was day-dream...

Did someone knew, thought? Surely, from a distance it could be told it was a fragment of Polish suffering. But how sad we were when in the afternoon an information came that they all had been executed by firing, quietly and with no obstacles.

Sometimes, on the day of a larger “making away” action, we talked between us in the morning, about who died in what a way – whether he went bravely or he feared death.

Our colleagues murdered on 28 October 1942 knew of what was in store for them. In block 3 they were told they would be executed by firing, they throw paper scraps to their colleagues who were to live, asking them deliver to their families. They made a decision to die “in a joyful spirit”, so that they would be told about well in the evening. Let somebody say, we Poles cannot do that.... Those who saw that picture told they would never forget it. From block 3, between 14 and 15, between the kitchen and blocks 16, 17 and 18 and further straight on between the hospital blocks, they went in a column in their fives, they carried their heads up in quiet, smiled faces here and there. They went without any escort. Behind them Palitsch with rifle on slide and Bruno, both of them smoking cigarettes, talking about irrelevant matters. It sufficed if the last five did “about turn” and the existence of those two butchers would be ceased..

So, why did they go on? Were they in fear for themselves? What should they fear in such moment, when they were walking to death anyway? It looked like psychosis. But they continued to go, because they had some reason for them. Informations, announced in advance by the authorities, confirmed by colleagues coming from freedom, that the whole family was held responsible for a prank of the prisoner, produced the desired effect. It was known that Germans were ruthless in application of repression and they kill families, showing in such cases as much bestiality as they could bring themselves to. How did bestiality look like? – was there anyone who knew it better than we?

To know or to see that your wife, mother, children were in such conditions, as women here in Brzezinka, was enough to paralyse any desire to attack the butchers.

The whole camp was a different matter. Seizure, destruction of files... Who would be responsible? It was difficult to reach thousands of families at once. But that also, after long consideration, we conditioned by the order, due to a possibility of repressions, due to our will to coordinate actions.

The whole camp was quite a different matter. To seize, to destroy files.... Who would be responsible? It was difficult to reach tens of thousands of families together. But we, upon prolonged consideration, conditioned it on the order because of a possibility of repression, because of our will to co-ordinate the action. For someone accustomed to death, which he faces several times a day, it is easier to think of his own death than of a terrible blow at his loved ones. Be it not only their death but those terrible experiences, taking those creatures out of this world by a hard, ruthless hand, breaking of their mental life and throwing them into a different world, a world of hell, to which not all pass smoothly. A thought, that your old mother or father was wading exhausted through mud, pushed and beaten with rifle's butt due to their son... or that children was going to death to gas due to their father, was much more heavy than to think of one's own death. If there

was someone, for whom it was a too high level, yet he went on, guided by the example of others. "He was ashamed" – it was a too weak word, he was unable to break loose from the column walking to death so bravely!

So they went on... Near the canteen (a wooden one in a small square behind block 21), the column going between block 21 and 27, seemed to stop, to hesitate, was near to go straight on. But it was one short moment, it turned square to the left and went just to the gate of block 11, just to the jaws of death. Not before the gate had closed after them and they were left there for several hours – they were to be executed in the afternoon – under the influence of an anticipation of death, various doubts began to come out of recesses of mind and there were five colleagues who incited to seize the whole camp, to start action here. They barricaded the gate and more serious things could probably occur, as the Germans had not reinforced the guard and all our commandos were waiting for a signal, were it not that the protest against death did not go beyond block 11 at all. Except for that five, nobody allowed to be carried away and a Silesian, a functionary of that block, informed SS-men of the seeds of mutiny, so Palitsch accompanied by several SS-men arrived at the block and disposed of those several prisoners, killing them first of all and leaving the rest for later on.

They only earned our opinion that they had been killed in action (captain doctor 146, colleague 129 and three other colleagues).

In the afternoon, they all were dead. From our organisation, apart from those mentioned above, our colleagues: 41, 88, 105, 108 and 146 died on that day, but there were also people from our organisation whom I do not mention here, as I did know all of them personally, it was impossible in conspiracy.

Upon return from work to the camp you could smell the blood of our friends in the air. They made an effort to carry the dead bodies to the crematorium before our return. All the way was stained with blood, which flowed down the carts when their bod-

ies were carried. In the evening of that day the whole camp felt in depression the death of those new victims.

It was only then, that I understood I was near to be placed in the list of those numbers read in the morning. When I recalled those two capos who noted the numbers, I did not know whether I had not been put down by that one with a notebook because I did not seem to be a dangerous prisoner or perhaps Grabner made a selection from an excessive amount of numbers, casting off such ones who had no cases here.

THE CONSPIRACY

A new transport of prisoners from Pawiak, Warsaw, arrived, among whom my friends and former co-workers of TAP in Warsaw: lieutenant-colonel: 156, 157, 158. They carried an information interesting for me: 156 told me how 25 had reached Warsaw from Oświęcim and how he himself carried him by car to Mińsk Litewski to work. 158 told me in detail how upon a message sent by me through sergeant 14, of the danger of sending the undesirable data from the public register from the locality of Z., my sister-in-law hurried to him. My kind-hearted friend 158 on the same day got into a train and went to the locality of Z., where he talked to the priest of the parish and explained him the matter. The priest made a pencil note next to the owner of my camp surname and promised to settle the matter positively. What he apparently did, as there was silence regarding my case in the political department.

Colleague 156 showed me among newcomers to the camp captain 159 from the Headquarters in Warsaw – he was a deputy of “Iwo 11”. One of our members 138 knew captain 159 personally, as he had been his subordinate in the past, while now, as he as a block supervisor, it was easy for him to take care of him (colleague 156 together with 117 already employed there, sheltered 76 to work). Since then the two TAP men worked and lived together.

From members of TAP, whom I had known before in Warsaw, the following went through Oświęcim: 1, 2, 3, 25, 26, 29, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 41, 48, 49, 85, 108, 117, 120, 124, 125, 131, 156, 157, 158.

Because 129 had been executed and 130 died of typhus, it was impossible to continue to dig the underground tunnel from block 28. The “tunnel” was not disclosed, while 5 people were arrested on another case.

In late autumn 1942, when block supervisors were used for work in the field, also 4 used to go far away to work with potatoes in the field. Confused SS-man of the political department, Lachman, came to him in some matter but 4 was absent. Lachman turned back and went off. Colleagues guessed quickly, burst into the room of 4 who, as a block supervisor of block 28 had his own room, and they removed many things which could bring about some more complications in the case.

Somebody must have shown his hand.

Lachman went to the gate and, as if he had a presentiment, he returned and made a thorough search of the room of 4 but he could find nothing. Nevertheless he awaited 4 and just upon his return in the evening he arrested him, led him to the bunker, and 4 never returned to block 28. He was interrogated in block 11, in bunkers and in the political department. Although 4 had some unpleasant mania lately, but justice must be done to him that he bore tortures bravely – interrogations in bunkers, and did not say a word, although he knew very much. The case was stopped on him. It happened he fell ill with typhus and was moved from the bunker to the typhus block. You should go for yourself through some graduation, in order to understand that as the space beyond the wires was freedom, so for a prisoner in the bunker freedom was the area of the camp. So, to get out of the bunker – although in a state of illness – meant for him a substitute of a freedom substitute. But also there he was assisted by an SS-man. Lachman did not give in. Yet 4 had a strong character and strong will. Some night his life ended...

The above-mentioned colleagues who came from Warsaw (156, 157, 158) told they had not expected to find such a good mental and physical condition of prisoners. They declared they had not

known anything, neither of the ways of torture used here, nor of the “wailing wall”, nor of phenol, nor of gas chambers. They did not think – and nobody thought it seriously in Warsaw at all – of Oświęcim as a post of some strength, but it was rather said they are skeletons only, it was of no use to rescue them as it was unprofitable. It was bitter to hear it while looking at the brave figures of our colleagues. So, valuable men walk to death here and die only to save those at freedom, while so much weaker people there contemptuously call us skeletons. How self-denial was needed to continue our deaths here, in order to rescue our brothers at freedom. Yes, all the camp methods of destruction hit us too hard, meanwhile such an opinion from freedom, and that ever- ignoring silence.

Four battalions had their service divided in such way that each battalion was on duty for a week, that means its task was to take action in case of some air raid, air-drop of weapon. It also received all products organised and delivered here by 76, 77, 90, 94, 117, it also divided food and underwear among cadre platoons.

Despite not to say a ban – how much did a ban matter to prisoners – but rather death penalty, a trade of gold and diamonds was developed in the camp very much. A sort of an organisation came into being, because any two prisoners who had some mutual business – an exchange of goods, for instance sausage of the slaughter-house into gold – were already bound together, as one of them caught with gold and beaten in the bunker could own up another one, from whom he got it and for what. Arrests for gold became more and more frequent in the camp. SS-men hunted that new organisation with zeal, as it brought them profits. Anyway, the “gold organisation” was an excellent lightning-rod. An inquiry, which followed traces leading to us, usually deviated and finally entered a track of the “gold organisation” and then got so confused, while SS-men got so satisfied of their new source of income that they did not want to make efforts in any other direction.

I wrote already that we observed “zugangs”, as you could not know what such a colleague from freedom would do, but also our old prisoners sometimes produced some surprises. Namely, due to thoughtlessness of one of our friends, our too widely enlightened 161, a typical schizophrenic, some day painted two diplomas of honour for “the distinction of the Garter” for our work for state independence, addressed to colonel 121 and colleague 59. He saved me due to an intervention of that friend of mine. And with those rolled-up diplomas he went in the dinner time across the square in the camp, to boast of his deed in the hospital. He could be stopped by an SS-man or a capo and asked right out what he was carrying with him, and he could expose his colleagues or a wider group to great complications. He showed them to doctor 2 and told about me that only I had my head duly screwed etc. That was why he did not paint a “diploma” for me. Doctor 2 with the aid of doctor 102 succeeded to take away the diplomas from him and destroy them. But 161 was incorrigible and in some dark evening I was called from block 22 by colleague 61 who took me to some SS-man. He turned out to be 161 himself, disguised in a uniform and overcoat of an SS-man. He could make use of them in an escape prepared shortly afterwards.

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FOOD PARCELS ALLOWED, AT LAST.

The Christmas came – the third one in Oświęcim.

I lived in block 22 in the company of the whole commando of the “Bekleidungswerkstätte”. How much that Christmas was different from the previous ones. Prisoners received, as always on Christmas, parcels from home with sweaters, in addition to clothes parcels they also received – allowed by the authorities at last – food parcels. Due to the “canada”, hunger was no more present. Parcels improved the food conditions more. News of major defeats of the German army heartened prisoners and radically raised spirits.

ONE OF ESCAPES: A REVENGE UPON A BUTCHER

With such spirits, it joyfully re-echoed the escape (30 December 1942) organised by Mietek – an Arbeitsdienst, Otto – an Arbeitsdienst, 161 and their fourth partner. This boldly prepared escape, made easier due to Arbeitsdiensts' right to move between the small and the great chain of guards, with a smart disguise of 161 as SS-man and impudent going outside the camp in a horse-drawn cart in broad daylight against a forged pass, beside a guard post, to whom the sham SS-man presented it from a distance, had that important effect for all prisoners of the camp that as a result of a found letter written by Otto, the authorities locked a senior of the camp, Bruno, prisoner no 1, an ill-famed butcher, to the bunker on that New Years' Eve.

Otto, a Bruno's enemy, wrote in the letter which he deliberately left in an overcoat abandoned in the cart at the distance of a dozen kilometres from the camp, that they were very sorry they were unable to take Bruno with them as arranged, because they had no time and must have hurried, while regarding that common gold which Bruno had, well, what to do, let it be left for Bruno. Our authorities, known of their quickness of mind, locked out our butcher Bruno in the bunker, where he remained for three months. He was doing better than any prisoner in the bunker. He was in a cell, but the camp got rid of that scoundrel for all, as he did not return to his former position – he went to the same position in Birkenau.

Meanwhile the camp was transported with joy during the Holidays, eating the food from the parcels from families and telling the newest joke about Bruno. Boxing matches were held in blocks, art gatherings in evenings. Amateur sets, orchestras, went from block to block. Spirits were so joyful, out of from the whole of the situation, that old prisoners used to nod and say: "Well, well, there was the camp of Auschwitz, but it is no more and only the last syllable remained: the bare 'witz'."

Indeed, the policy in the camp became weaker and weaker from month to month. But it was no obstacle to some very tragic scenes that could be witnessed in that time.

Part IV

1943

“A BOY OF 10 WAS STANDING AND SEARCHING
SOMEBODY WITH HIS EYES”

Going from the tannery in five hundreds, just after the New Year, I witnessed that a group of women and man who stood before the crematorium (it was the old coal-fired crematorium erected just next to the camp). There were ten to twenty persons, young and old. They were standing before the crematorium like a herd of cows before a slaughter-house. They knew what they had come here for. Among them a boy of 10 was standing and searching somebody with his eyes among out hundreds passing by, perhaps his father, perhaps brother... While approaching that group, you were afraid to see contempt in the eyes of those women and children. We – the five hundred strong and healthy men, did not respond to that they were just to walk to death. You were seething and writhing inwardly. But not, while passing by, we found with relief only a contempt for death in their eyes.

On entering the gate, we saw another group, which was standing against the wall with their hands up, of people with their backs turned to the marching columns. Prior to death, those ones will also face an inquiry, they will go through tortures in block 11 before the butcher Palitsch fires shots in the back of their heads and they are carried off in carts full of dead bodies covered with blood to the crematorium.

When we were entering the gate, that first group of prisoners has been driven into the crematorium. For a dozen of people, a

bottle of gas was sometimes stinted, they were stunned with rifle butts and pushed half-conscious into an incandescent grate.

From our block 22, the nearest to the crematorium, we sometimes heard wall-muffled terrible cries and moans of people being tortured, rapidly done away.

Not all returned from work along our road. Those who did not see the faces of victims, were never free from a thought: perhaps mother, perhaps father, perhaps wife, perhaps daughter... But the heart of a camp man is hard. Half an hour later some were standing to buy margarine or tobacco and did not know they were standing next to a huge pile of naked dead bodies, thrown here one upon another, "made away" today by an injection of phenol. Sometimes somebody tread with his shoe on a dead, already stiff leg, looked: "Look here, Stasio... Well.... Today his turn, my turn next week maybe..."

Nevertheless the eyes of that little boy looking at us, searching somebody, haunted me long in the night.

CONSEQUENCES OF CHRISTMAS GATHERING

The frolics in the camp due to the pre-holiday moods resulted in one history hard for us. Block 27, which was a uniform/underwear store, was the work area of the “Bekleidungskammer” composed nearly exclusively of Poles. The commando was a good one – a work under the roof, which gave those additional privileges that its workers, who supplied gratuitously their colleagues with underwear, uniforms, blankets, shoes, had an opportunity to receive food products from well-off prisoners placed on positions of block supervisors, employees of the slaughter-house or food stores. So, the place was good and with the help of 76 we placed many colleagues there. Some laxity in the camp in that time, absence of Bruno who was locked up resulted in that, that some of us slightly neglected precautionary measures.

Colleagues in block 27 held a common Christmas ‘wafer’ gathering, in which 76 recited his verse on patriotic subject. (a Silesian woman had two sons, one of them was in German army, another one was prisoner of Oświęcim, during his escape the former son of the Silesian women, who was in his guard post and did not know anything, shot his brother dead). The verse was beautifully written, the atmosphere was nice. Result: the authorities decided that Poles in block 27 were too well-off, while the political department made of it an organisation created by Poles in block 27. On 6 January 1943 SS-men of the political department came into block 27 in work time. They summoned an assembly of the whole

commando. Asked, who was colonel here. Colonel 24 in that time restrained himself from speaking, then Lachmann approached him and pulled him out of the rank (the case had already been examined by the political department).

Then they began to select. They divided in three groups: Reichsdeutsche and Volksdeutsche became one group, which they left at work in the block. They divided all remaining Poles into two groups, putting some ten to twenty educated men to the right, among them colonel 24, major 150, captain 162, second lieutenant 163, barrister 142, while to the left they put those ones who, in the eyes of SS-man, could pass for uneducated people, among whom major 85 who pretended to be gamekeeper, second lieutenant 156, collegian – my nephew 39. They were kept standing at attention for a dozen hours in the frost. Then the educated group was put into the bunker, the uneducated group was sent to so-called “Kiesgrube” named after Palitch. The former ones were inquired and tortured in the bunker, to force them to confess they were organised, they were asked what organisation they represented.

The latter ones, sent to be done away at work in the frost, seemed also to be doomed. But some of them were able to wriggle out of that commando after several months of toilsome work. A pair of friends: 117 and 156 did it too quickly. They worked together in the “Bekleidungskammer”, lived together in block 3 in a separate room – a warehouse. Both of them happily avoided attributing them to the educated group and, having avoided the bunker, they got to the “Palitch kiesgrube”.

Friend 156, several months earlier, just upon his arrival from Warsaw, asked by me how they reacted in Warsaw on escapes from Oświęcim, replied they did it in two ways: The Supreme Headquarters used to decorate with the order of *Virtuti Militari* (perhaps he understood he would encourage me to escape?) while the population, which did not know of the abolishment of collective responsibility, used to consider it egoism. Then, when he was placed in a difficult situation he began to prompt me to escape

with him, but then I had no such intentions. Unfortunately, he did not live it, poor fellow.

Both of them busied themselves with their case too quickly, they fell ill and upon their recovery they found another, lighter work. They still were not experienced camp men. One day, when I thought they were still in the hospital, I got to know they both had been executed (16 February 1943). In that another commando, Lachmann asked them from where they had come, they were dead on the same day.

Soon afterwards, in March, it was executed the whole group of educated people, tortured and inquired in the bunker on the subject of an organisation, which had been scented by one of capos who witnesses the unhappy "Christmas wafer gathering". They said nothing. Honour to them, colleagues of our work.

“BEKLÄIDUNGSKAMMER”

Having expelled Poles from the “Bekleidungskammer”, those positions were manned with Ukrainians who nevertheless did not suite the SS-man, chief of the commando and capo, so some of the Poles began to wind their way here. Supplies of materials from that domain were stopped. But other supplies operated effectively. As was calculated by officer-cadett 90, from the slaughter-house for Christmas 1942 only, despite continuous searches, 700kg of pork-butcher’s products were transferred through the gate.

PSEUDO-MEDICAL EXPERIMENTS

As lately as in late spring 1943, some unusual preparations were started in block 10. All prisoners and part of beds were removed. Outside, baskets of planks were made in windows, to make it impossible to look inside. Some instruments, apparatus were delivered.

As early as in late autumn some unusual preparations were started in block 10. All prisoners and part of beds were removed. Wooden baskets were made outside in windows, to prevent view to the inside. Some instruments, apparatus were delivered. Then, in evenings, some German professors, students, began to turn up. They carried somebody, they worked upon something in the night, departing in the morning or staying for several days.

A professor met by me one time, produced an abominable impression. His eyes could be called loathsome.

For some time we knew nothing of that block, various conjectures were made.

But they could not do it without any aid of flegers – of the camp hospital. In the beginning, some housework was concerned, then various kinds of assistance. They took two flegers and it happened both of them were of our organisation. Our colleagues penetrated at last the ever-closed block 10. For some time it did give us anything, as they were not let go out of block 10. But one day one of them, 101, showed up to me terribly upset and told he

would not stand it there any longer, that this was already beyond his endurance.

Experiments were carried there. Doctors and students of medicine experimented there, having there a bulk of human material for which they bore no responsibility to anybody. The lives of those guinea-pigs was given over to the pray of those degenerates of the camp – anyway they would be murdered, no matter how and where – in any case some ash would remain only.

So, various kinds of experiments of the sphere of sexuality were done. Sterilisation of women and men by a surgical manipulation. irradiation of sexual organs of both sexes with some rays, aimed to remove reproductive capacities. Additional next tests indicated if the result was positive or not.

Sexual intercourses were not used. There was a commando of several men who had to supply their sperm, which immediately was injected to women. Tests showed that after several months the women, exposed to an irradiation of their organs, became pregnant again. Then much stronger rays were applied, which burnt women's organs and several dozens of women died in terrible torments.

Women of all races were used for experiments. Polish, German, Jewish, and recently Gypsy women were delivered from Birkenau. From Greece, several dozens of young girls were transported, who died in those experiments. All of them, even after a successful experiment, were liquidated. Neither a woman nor a man came out alive out of block 10.

Efforts were done to produce artificial sperm, but all tests showed negative results. Some substitute of sperm injected caused some infections. Women who passed that experiment were then done away with phenol.

Looking at all those torments, my colleague reached some state of nervousness unusual for old prisoners. Colleague 57 also witnessed what occurred in block 10 (both of them are alive and are at freedom at now).

Many times in Oświęcim, when we were in our bunch in evenings we told that if any of us would come out alive from here, it would be by miracle only and it would be difficult for him to communicate with people who lived normally on the Earth in that time. Some matters would seem to be too small for him. Also, he would not be understood. But if anyone would actually come out, it would be his duty to announce to the world, how true Poles died here. He should also tell, how people in general died here, murdered by people... How strange it sounds in the language of Christians: murdered by their fellow creatures as centuries before. Therefore I wrote that we got involved so much.... But, in fact, where to? Where are we getting involved in our progress of “civilisation”?

“THE AUTHORITIES ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SO A LARGE CONCENTRATION OF POLES READY TO DO EVERYTHING – WAS A DANGER”

News came through our channels from the political department that all prisoner Poles were to be transported somewhere, from fear of some occurrences in the camp. The authorities acknowledged that so a large concentration of Poles, whose experiences resulted in their determination and turned them into individuals ready to do everything, concentrated on a Polish area, with a support of the population of the region. – is a danger. Any landing operation, any air-drop of weapon... It was not in plans of our allies or perhaps our people failed to notice. So, our enemy noticed it.

Initially, they began to draw out part of Poles from commandos and to accustom the commandos to work without them. A Pole was the best worker, always and in all commandos. Germans used to tell that as good as a German, but it was not true. I am ashamed to admit that he was better than them. Initially, those Poles were drawn out of craftsmen commandos, who showed by their conduct that they had become professionals of their trade just in the camp. One and a half hundred were relieved of their posts in the “Bekleidungswerkstätte” out of five hundred men. Due to my appearance of an educated man, I was included in that group. It was on 2 February 1943.

I somehow was not worried about that at all. I believed that my dismissal on that day would not turn harm to me. On the next day I worked in a basket-makers' commando, accepted there by my friends. In general, it was customary in the camp that an old number was accepted to all commandos, he was a senior in the world of prisoners. I worked there for one day only, not for profit of the camp, as I learned to make clogs of straw.

IN THE PARCEL DEPARTMENT. ADDITIONAL
FOOD FOR COLLEAGUES.

On the next day I had an excellent work in the newly created commando of the “parcel department”. Due to a permission to send food parcels to prisoners, more and more parcels began to be delivered to the camp by trucks. It was an inconvenience for camp authorities. It was allowed to receive one parcel up to 5 kg a week. Expecting that the number of parcels could not be decreased, large parcels were banned, while it was allowed to send small parcels – up to 250g with no limit on their number per week. It turned out then that the authorities were mistaken. Countless amounts of small parcels were being delivered every day. Families satisfied that they could lend their related prisoners a helping hand, instead of one big parcel a week, hurried to send little parcels every day. The result of the regulation was contrary to the intentions of the authorities. The bulk of work on registration of a huge amount of parcels and their delivery to prisoners, required a whole machinery, a whole commando, to which I had just managed to get.

Three small rooms in the third block were left at our disposal. One whole room was packed with parcels. The efficiency of work of all commandos in the camp required here an effort to make up for arrears, which was to prisoners’ advantage if parcels were delivered them quickly. Two shifts of the commando, 20 prisoners

each, worked here. The parcel department was in operation 24 hours a day. I deliberately joined the night shift.

Due to the day-and-night segregation of parcels, the main chancellery had to work parallel day and night. It was so, because it wrote a note for each parcel and sent several hundred notes each half an hour to the main chancellery, where it was indicated upon them, in what block a given number (a prisoner) was currently placed or a cross was put down to indicate that he was dead. Upon the return of the notes, parcels were segregated by putting them into shelves provided separately for each blocks and by casting aside, into a huge pyramid, those parcels which corresponded to the cross-indicated notes. There were a very great amount of parcels owed to dead prisoners. In addition to those ones sent for prisoners of Jewish, French, Bohemian transports, who mainly had been already done away in whole, also many Polish families sent parcels, unaware that the prisoner had died, because, as I mentioned, a notification of death was not always sent or the political department was reluctant to send it for several months.

Better parcels of dead prisoners, mainly from France or Bohemia, which contained wine and fruits, were carried away basketful by SS-men into their canteen. Worse parcels went usually into our prisoners' kitchen, where also various food products, left after sorting them by SS-men, were delivered from the "canada". All that was loaded into pots.

In that period we used to eat sweet soups, which smelled sort of perfumes and we found residuals of cakes, torts in them. One time in our room we found a residual of not fully solved soap in our soup. Sometimes the cooks found a gold thing on the bottom of a pot or just coins, secretly put into a portion of bread, bread roll or a cake, hidden there by their dead owner.

In the parcel department, its workers with full conscious used to eat food products from parcels of their dead colleagues, while mainly giving away bread and butter to their colleagues more hungry than themselves. Nevertheless, one should be careful to

eat food from parcels of dead people. Only the “superior men” were allowed to eat it, prisoners were prohibited to do it under death penalty. A search of those coming out from their work disclosed one time in pockets of seven prisoners white bread, butter and sugar taken from parcels of dead prisoners. All of them were executed on the same day.

The chief of the parcel department was an SS-man, an Austrian, quite bearable as by SS standards.

After the reintroduction of the original standard of one 5kg parcel each week, various parcels were delivered, sometimes whole suitcases, the chief of the parcel department did not object them, he gave all of them to their owners, searched them superficially, due to lack of time he sometimes cut the strings only, but when a block supervisor, a German scoundrel, while giving away parcels in his block, took out a handful of sweets from a parcel of a living prisoners, the chief of parcel department made a report and the block supervisor, though a German, was executed on that day. In this respect there was justice...

I found another way to give additional food to colleagues. I worked in the parcel department at night. Before me, an SS-man used to seat by a hot stove, who always about two o'clock fell asleep. After me, there lie a huge pile of dead colleagues' parcels, Separately there was a small stack of better parcels ready for a possible delivery to the SS-men's canteen. In the course of carrying, registering and shifting of parcels, I unnoticed took a parcel from that separate heap and, while the SS-man was snoring soundly, I unwrapped the paper, tore off the address, turned over the paper, re-wrapped the parcel, tied it with string, wrote the address of a colleague in the camp. I was officially authorised to re-pack any wrongly packed parcels. Some parcels had their packing totally destroyed, all the more they were suitable. Some of them I did not re-pack due to stamps on them, but I just stuck a new address written on another sheet of paper. Such a parcel went on in the usual way and was placed in a relevant shelf.

The SS-man ha a comfortable work, as he used to slip at night, while in daytime used to cycle to his wife, who lived about 20 km from here. So, all were satisfied with that state of affairs. I tried to “send” eight parcels each night, each two parcels for one battalion, sometimes I was able to do less, sometimes even more.

In the morning I visited my friends and told them not to look surprised upon reception of some strange parcel.

As a result of the change of my commando, I was moved to block 6. In the block and at my work I got acquainted with several colleagues whom I recruited to our organisation: second-lieutenant 164, second-lieutenant 165 and platoon commander 166.

PLAN OF ESCAPE THROUGH THE SEWER SYSTEM

In the end of 1942 Olek, second-lieutenant 167 was delivered to camp in a whole transport from Kraków. I was then informed that he was a hero of the Montelupi prison, that he succeeded to avoid death due to his escape from the prison, that he was then charged with two death sentences, but because he was smart and able to cope with SS-men somehow, he pretended to be a doctor and, as it was said, even gave them medical attendance, so he survived in some way. But then he was delivered to Oświęcim, where he would be done away for sure. I got acquainted with him, I liked his humour. I proposed a way of getting out, which I was preparing for myself. It was the sewer system.

A plan of sewers, given me by colleagues from the construction office, explained precisely the best places of entry into the sewer system. Usually it was that the German authorities got wise not before some prisoner had made use of a way of escape, and then it was nearly impossible to repeat that way. Our saying “Pole is wise after the event” shall be probably extended to other nationalities also.

As I gave my way of exit to Olek 167, I gave it up for myself but I was still not going to leave, while his case was a grave one. I could send a report through him, I hoped that I would find some happy coincidence.

In that time lieutenant 168 came to me with a plan of escape from the commando in which he worked. He was capo's deputy

there. The capo fell ill so he had more freedom of action. He left the camp with his commando for surveying, up to a distance of several kilometres.

I introduced him to second-lieutenant 167, the plan of lieutenant 168 suited me more, so 167 began to prepare to leave the camp in this way. But he moved too quickly from the parcel department to the surveying commando in which 168 worked.

One night in January 1943 seven colleagues went out to freedom via the SS-men's kitchen. When the authorities saw that hanging of prisoners caught escaping did not discourage prisoners from such attempts, they conceived a new idea. It was announced in all blocks, that for the escape of a prisoner his family would be carried into the camp. It touched our sore spot. No one wanted to endanger his family.

One day upon our return to the camp we saw two women – a likeable old lady and a nice young one, who stood by a post in which a table was placed, with inscription “The inconsiderate act of you colleague exposed those two women to a stay in the camp”. It was to be a repression for the escape of one colleague. We felt strongly about the women, In the beginning the camp cursed the scoundrel who had endangered his mother and fiancée to save his own life, but later it turned out their numbers were about 30 thousand while the current number in the women's camp was above 50 thousand. It was ascertained they were two women taken from the camp of Rajsko and placed here by a post for several hours. An SS-man stood near the post and made any conversation impossible. Anyway, there was no certainty whether families would not be carried to the camp, so other colleagues did not decide to escape.

Colleagues 167 and 168 were preparing an escape. Contact was made with Kraków through civilian population. Clothes and liaison officers were to be prepared in several places. 167 proposed me to go out with them. When I talked about in detail with 168 their way of escape, I concluded it was not polished up in some

details. Two SS-men who went with them for surveying and, contrary to a ban imposed by camp authorities, sometimes attended a taproom to have a drink of vodka together, were planned to be made drunk and tied up. Here it was planned, if it failed to make them drunk, they decided a “wet job”. Then I protested firmly in the name of the organisation. The organisation could not agree for such a plan of their going out, which could expose the remaining prisoners to great repression. It was an art to exit, but the exit should be done in such a way as not to bring about hard consequences to the camp... So they began to prepare for the SS-men a narcosis using luminal. Powdered luminal contrived from the HKB and added to vodka, applied to capos for testing purposes, failed to produce the desired effects because it did not solve in vodka and remained as a residue on the bottom of glasses. So they planned to give luminal in sweets.

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GYPSIES DELIVERED TO GAS

In the meantime, from ten to twenty thousand of Gypsies were transported to Birkenau and located in a separately fenced camp, whole families together in the beginning. Then men were separated out, and then done away “in the Oświęcim manner”.

ONE OF ESCAPES: "BARREL OF DIOGENES"

Some day colleagues in Rajsko arranged a clever escape, which we called "barrel of Diogenes". At a dark, windy and rainy night ten to twenty prisoners crossed the wires, having drawn the wires aside with rods and pushed among them a usual wood bottomless barrel, in which food had been previously transported and which served then as an insulation against electric current, then they crept across like cats through a muff. The authorities raged and went mad again. So many undesired witnesses of what was being done in Oświęcim were at freedom again. They decided to do their best to catch the escapers. They sent military units and searches lasted for three days. The camp was closed, as "posts" and soldiers to escort columns of prisoners to work were absent. The authorities spent that time for a de-lousing of the camp, which they completed in three days.

By a coincidence, 167 and 168 had agreed, with the outer organisation, an escape to be done the day after the "barrel of Diogenes". Lack of any opportunities to leave the camp made that escape impossible. But it was not all. In commandos, chiefs and capos were in fear of the raging authorities and were conducting searches of prisoners. They were inspecting the work itself and numbers as such, they were looking for anything which others might find faulty. In the parcel department, chief and capo asked, where Olek was, who had worked there and who was absent now? Was he ill? They hurried to the chancellery and got to know that Olek

was in another block and he worked in another commando, and because he moved to another work and, what was more, in the field, without a notice and a card from the "Arbeitsdienst" while he was charged with a serious case in the political department, so they classed it in the category of escape preparations and Olek was moved to SK for punishment.

I had prepared the way of escape via sewer system long before, just in case. But it was not an easy way. The network of sewers shown on the plan was running in various directions, but it was composed mainly of pipes of 40-60cm in diameter. Only in three directions from a hatch most convenient for me, near block 12, sewer branches of frog-like cross-section of 60 cm vertically and 90 cm horizontally. One time I tried to enter there and opened the manhole grate which barred the entry into the sewer. But I was not alone to be interested in that question. Our other colleagues knew that way also. I entered into agreement with them. They were 110 and 118. There were several others, who had an eye on the sewers. The question was, who would make up his mind and who would use them.

Before the last Christmas, a group of Arbeitsdienst men was to go to freedom, but also 61 was eager to do that, I had indicated this way to him and perhaps several prisoners would choose that holiday night, because, as usual, the watchfulness of guards was decreased in that time. But it was the Christmas Eve, when a second Christmas tree was put up just next to the place of exit and it was illuminated glaringly together with that place.

When later I worked in a night commando in the parcel department, I had the entry of a manhole very close to me. Then at night, having changed into working overalls in block 3, I barged two times into the stinky sewer system. In the manhole, a hinged grate had padlocks below, now broken away and submerged in mud; from above they appeared to be locked. From that place, three ways branched off, through those wider sewers.

One sewer ran between blocks 12 and 13, 22 and 23, then turned left and ran near the kitchen, and farther off, behind the last tower next to block 21, it made a slight turn right and an exit was as far off as behind a railway line. That sewer was very long, about 80 meters. It had a great advantage: a safe exit, but also a disadvantage: it was terribly silted. I passed as little as 60 meters through that sewer, to examine a possibility to move in it, and I scrambled out totally exhausted. It was a perfectly dark night and I was fully soiled. I washed myself and changed my underwear in block 3. I admit, I was indisposed to that for some time.

In the second direction the sewer was dryer and it was much easier to move in it; additionally, it was much shorter. It was laid between blocks 4 and 15, 5 and 16 and went on straight to 10 and 21 and then also straight on. It went upwards, there was less and less sewage and water from blocks in it. But its exit was placed two meters behind the tower of a "post". The plate, which covered the exit outside the fence, even if prepared in daytime by friends from outside the camp, next to a gravel pit, was difficult to be lifted up in the night soundlessly just below a soldier in the tower.

There remained the third direction – the shortest one, about 40 meters, an extension of the former one. It contained the largest amount of water. It ran between blocks 1 and 12 and then went outside the wires while running between the camp headquarters and a newly erected building. The exit was on a road, quite well visible, especially from the main guard post, against the light. It was here that the Christmas tree had been put up for us in the past. But Christmas trees will be placed here no more.

Also, there was an underground "submarine" with permanent staff, but I could not take it into consideration in my plans. To sum up, I was able to risk going out, but I still considered it was not the right time for me to leave the camp.

PSEUDO-POLISH SS-MEN: “SUCH KINDS OF DOUBLE-FACED AND NASTY PEOPLE WERE USEFUL FOR US MANY TIMES”

In one evening, we came to a conclusion that a regular war was waged against us. We usually got information from the political department, from the camp headquarters, from the hospital, which were carried by SS-men who served two masters, and who delivered information through Volksdeutschs or Reichdeutschs working in our place. Some of the SS-men in the past were junior officers of the Polish army and they plainly wished to make clear they would go with us if something happened, and would give us the keys of the weapon store. However, we did not need the keys because all copies of them had been already made by our colleagues in the ironwork shop, yet such kinds of double-faced and nasty people were useful for us many times, they often forewarned us of measures of the authorities, with some ever-realising messages.

GREAT TRANSPORTATION OF POLES TO OTHER CAMPS

Apparently, Grabner did not trust his own staff and, trying to preserve confidentiality up to the last moment, kept secret the decision and list of candidates for transport. He confided his decisions to Palitsch.

On 7 March 1943 a ban on leaving the blocks was announced. Lists were delivered to blocks and doors were locked. In blocks, numbers of prisoners were being called, exclusively Poles, who were ordered to prepare for transportation. There were called numbers of only those ones, whose cases were finished and to whom the political department laid no claims. Transports were to depart to other camps, it was said that much better than Oświęcim. We were informed in confidence that initial transports would go to some better camps, while the next to worse and worse ones.

The atmosphere in rooms was very differentiated. Some were satisfied that they would go to better camps and would not be executed here, others worried that they were not to go, so their cases are still unfinished and they might be executed. Others were very dissatisfied that they would go, because they had got some good positions after hard years of work, while there they would be “zugangs” again and a hard selection again, and nobody knew if he succeeded there. But the prevailing opinion was it was worth to go, because nowhere else there would be such hell as here. Additionally – no one asked us of our opinions. If it was in

daytime and blocks were opened, perhaps it would be possible to contrive something. Whoever wanted to stay, he could perhaps fall ill – but in the night nothing could be done.

I was called at once in the first night of 7/8 March. We were ordered to take our belongings and to move to block 12, completely emptied to that purpose, so we walked there with our things. Also block 19 was taken, as our numbers were called for three nights (7, 8 and 9 March) and there was about 6 thousand of us. In blocks 12 and 19 we were also locked up and we could communicate by windows only.

Doctor 2 came to the staircase and signalled through the door-pane that I should fall ill, if I wanted to stay. Taking into consideration my conspiracy work and position in the work world of prisoners – it was worth to be turned in mind. On 10 March we were drawn out in fives, in columns, in the red alley, as early as at six o'clock in the morning. An inspection of the state of health of prisoners, appointed by the political department for transport was held here, by a commission composed of army doctors, Germans.

I stood near colonel 11 and Kazio 39. My brain was working hectic, making specifications of who was to go and who was to stay. The good, trustworthy team of colleagues, with whom I worked here, was to go off. I rather inclined to go with them.

The medical commission admired the state of health of prisoners – Poles (with an exception of newly arrived “zugangs”) to be of excellent physical conditions and, in general, well nourished, they were shaking their heads and telling: how such ones could survive... Apart from parcels and the “canada” it was in some percentage a contribution of the organisation; here the results could be seen.

But my task was the continuity of work here. Nevertheless, with whom should I stay here? I began to talk about that question. Colonel 11 and Kazio 39 were glad they would go. They were directed to Buchenwald, it was told one of better camps. My friend colonel 11 was of the opinion it was my duty, for all that,

to stay here in this hell. I had much time for consideration. The examination was conducted very slowly. We stood for all the day and part of the night. Our turn, with colonel 11 and second-lieutenant 61, came about two o'clock in the night. Much sooner I decided to stay in Oświęcim. Through colleague 169, who was allowed to move about, I received from HKB a belt against rupture, which I did not suffer at all. At two in the night the commission was tired. Colonel 11, older by ten to twenty years than me and, compared to me, a scrag, was nevertheless found fit for work and included in the transport. But when I turned up naked before the commission, with the belt placed upon a fictitious rupture, the doctors waved their hands and said: "Weg! We don't need such ones!"; and I was not accepted for transportation.

I marched off to block 12 and, having reported their with a notice of exemption from transportation, just afterwards I returned to block 6, into my bed, and on the next day to my usual work in the parcel department.

On 11 March, having rejected those unfit for work and those who tried to pass for unfit ones, Poles in good health were transported away – 5 thousand with a small addition.

Because from the main chancellery a detailed list was sent to us, with numbers of transported prisoners, to re-send them food parcels delivered for them, we ascertained precisely that those five thousand Poles, colleagues, had gone in five different directions, about one thousand to each of the following camps: Buchenwald, Neuengamme, Flossenbürg, Gross-Rosen, Sachsenhausen.

The basic core of the organisation head was able to evade the transport, so we continued our work.

A week later, on the first Sunday, we were surprised again. To avoid a tide of hasty work just before the departure of the transports, it was decided to do it quietly in advance. All Poles, who remained in all blocks in the whole camp, had to turn up on that day before a medical commission which put a letter "A" or "U" next to the number of each prisoner, which indicated the

category of health of that prisoner – fit or unfit for work. It was a surprise, because it eliminated any opportunities of scheming.

I deliberated what to do. To receive “A” – meant to go in the next nearest transport and, in addition, to worse camps, as I had not gone to those better ones. To receive the category “U” – although it was told that ill persons would be sent to Dachau where they would have better conditions in hospitals, nevertheless, from my knowledge of the then authorities of the camp I concluded that anybody with such letter would rather go via gas and chimney. I had to find some solution. Anyway, I decided not to put on my belt. The medical commission, before which I turned up, sent me off with no detailed examination, having put down the letter “A” in the register next to my number.

I looked well. Army doctors, Germans, while looking at the bodies of Poles in excellent condition, also were astonished in that time and told aloud: “What a regiment could be formed of them”. Then, as I was a material for transportation, I had to do something with myself and not to go to the “worse camps”. SS-men, chiefs of commandos, responsible for some department of work, willingly exempted Poles – professionals. They always preferred to work with Poles, who were the best workers. Nevertheless, due to some regulations of the authorities in that time, they could not do it to a wider scale. It was also difficult to be a professional in the parcel department. But I somehow succeeded, and through doctor 2 and colleague 149 I was exempted, by the chief of the parcel department, as one of the total amount of five exempted men, as an indispensable worker. And I was not included in a new transport, which departed by two turns (on 11 and on 12 April 1943) – both of them to Mauthausen. Then 2.5 thousand Poles were transported. In total, 7.5 thousand Poles in good health were transported in March and April.

Part V

THE ESCAPE

FINAL DECISION

Then I decided that further stay here might be too dangerous and difficult for me. After more than 2.5 years I had to start my work anew, with new people. On 13 April in the forenoon I went to the basement of block 17, where in a separate room captain 159 of the Headquarters of Warsaw was working, whose figure was known to me, as he had been shown to me by the later executed second lieutenant Stasiek 156 and major 85, with whom I had no conversation until then because our member 138 was in charge of him. I talked to him for the first time. I said: "I'm here for two years and seven months. I have been conducting my work here. Lately, I've got no instructions. Now Germans have carried away our best people, with whom I've been working. It's necessary to start anew. I think my further stay here is nonsense. So therefore I go out."

Captain 159 looked at me astonished and said: "Well, I can understand you, but is it possible to arrive and depart Oświęcim at will?" I replied: "It is."

Since then, all my efforts were focused on searching the most proper way to go out. Now I talked to major 85 who was in the hospital with doctor 2, as a false patient, he had a rest there and in that way he avoided transports, as ill persons were not taken then. But he had the "A" category. Before my departure I contrived to set him up at work in the parcel department. I came to him as someone well acquainted with the area around Oświęcim and

asked him, to where he would go and what direction he would advise me. Zygmunt looked at me incredulously and said: "If someone else told it, I would think he was making fun of me, but when you ask, I believe you are going to go out. I would go in the direction of Trzebinia, Chrzanów." I showed him a map of the surroundings of Oświęcim (scale 1:100.000) that I got from 76. I intended to go to Kęty. We bid good-bye heartily. I charged him, Bohdan, with the care of the whole, in case of any action.

I went to friend 59 and charged him with the organisational aspect of the whole, to be supported also by brave and natural in his way colonel 121, who was the official chief of the whole, and a friend of 59.

Then I should go out... and really. There is always a difference between saying of doing something and doing it actually. Long in the past, years before, I worked upon unification of those two things in one. But first of all I was a believing person. I believed that if God wished to help, then I would really go out. There was one more reason, which precipitated my decision. I got to know though doctor 2 from zugangs, who had arrived from Pawiak, that 161 who had escaped together with the Arbeitsdients from Oświęcim, had been caught in Warsaw and is imprisoned in Pawiak. As I did not trust that man (due to rumours about his past and due to gold collected here unscrupulously, in the form of tooth caps of dead people, as well as due to the story of the "diplomas" which he painted for the work of colonel 121 and 59 in the organisation), I took in consideration that he could agree to work for Germans and begin to relate what he had seen in the camp. I told about it with doctor 2, with colleague 59 and colleague 106; my opinion was that those, of whom he knew that they were in the organisation (the head of it only), had to go out from here.

As soon as in the mid of March, my work colleague and friend 164 informed me that one of our colleagues, whom I knew by sight, Jasiek 170, was going to go out of the camp, so if I wished to send a report, it could be done through him. I became acquainted

with Jasiek and I liked him at once. I especially liked his ever-smiled mouth, wide shoulders and his outspokenness. In sum – a first-class comrade. I told him about the sewer opportunities as an ultimate solution and asked how he himself would do it. He replied that while going to the town with a rollwaga to a bakery for bread, he saw bicycles of bakers parked next to the bakery. – If not possible otherwise, then just mount a bicycle and go off in haste.

I dissuaded. After some time, he came to me with information that if we succeeded to get into the bakery, there was large, heavy and metal-clad door, which could be opened as it was composed of two halves. In order to look closely at that door, he moved, upon permission of his commando's capo ("Brotabladung-kommando") to the bakery for several days, supposedly to eat a lot of bread. After all, Jasiek weighed 96kg then, but his capo liked him as an old and joyful worker.

It was the end of March. After five days of his stay in the bakery, Jasiek returned resigned. Work in the bakery was very hard. For 5 days he had perspired 6kg of his weight and he weighed 90kg. What was worse, he noticed that the door could not be opened. A tremendous lock, fixed in one half of that door, which inserted a bolt into the other half when the key was being turned, perhaps would not stop us if to pull back the bars on the both halves of the door (4 in total), but there was also a hook outside which fastened both halves upon closing the door. Hard work and that hook discouraged Jasio. So we did not tell of the bakery and switched our interest upon sewers.

CHANGES IN ORGANISATION OF ROLL-CALLS

Two innovations were introduced in the camp in that time. In the initial years we had three roll-calls a day. Apart from other brutal and primitive ways of doing away, there were roll-calls with prolonged standing at attention – one of the ways of silent making people away. Then, there was a change of ways of murder into some more “cultural” ones – when thousands people were being done away by phenol and gas, and later the volume of transports to gas reached the number of 8 thousand people a day. In this progress of “culture”, having rejected doing away with a stick, it was decided that the silent doing away by standing at attention on roll-calls, of poor results if compared to the equally silent doing away with gas, was absurd and in 1942 the noon roll-call was abolished. Since that time, the camp had two roll-calls. On Sundays, as previously, there was one roll-call at 10:30.

Then, in spring 1943 an innovation was abolishment of one more roll-call – the morning one, as well as introduction of civilian clothes for prisoners, hundreds of thousands of which were left by gassed people. Civilian clothes with stripes of oil paint along the back and in the waist of the jacket as well as trousers, were allowed to be worn by prisoners who worked inside the camp, within the wires. All those who worked outside and went beyond the fence – except for capos and untercapos – were not allowed to wear civilian clothes.

Anyway, there was a great difference between now and before. Now colleagues slept in beds (or in beds of boards). They wrapped themselves in downy blankets out of “canada” left by gassed transports from Holland. Those who left in the camp in the morning, put on some excellent civilian clothes of wool, somehow deformed by the bright stripes, and went to work as clerks into the office, without standing in a roll-call. The dinner break was not harmed by any roll-call or standing at attention. There was one evening roll-call only, which was not toilsome in that time. We did not stand for long, even on a day when it was fixed that three colleagues had escaped from the hospital – there was no standing at attention. Only those escapers were looked for scrupulously, as it was not desired to have those witnesses at freedom.

Intense efforts were made to radically change the horrible opinion of Oświęcim which had already oozed out, for a better one. It was announced then that the camp would be renamed from concentration camp into an Arbeitslager, anyway, no beating was visible any longer. At least it was so in our place – in the main camp.

In that time, I used to compare some camp pictures of 1940 or 1941, when an SS-man in the presence of a dozen of us went mad and murdered two prisoners and then turned to us, as he felt our sights stabbed in him, as if he needed to excuse himself, he said quickly: “Das ist ein Vernichtungslager!” Now, all traces in human memory, that it could have been before, were to be erased. Interesting, how they would be able to erase from memory: the operation of gas chambers and the operation of as much as six crematoriums.

Nothing changed regarding the treatment of those caught during unsuccessful escape. Two of them were again hanged in the square, to deter their future followers. Then Jasio and me looked at each other and told themselves by our glance: “Well, both sides will try. We will try to go out and they shall try to catch us.”

EXAMINATION OF THE BAKERY

When Janek was resting a bit from his several days of work in the bakery, I asked him if it was possible to remove that damned hook from the door. Janek explained that eventually it would be possible, as it was fixed by a screw with a nut on the door from the inside. During next days Jasiek, transporting bread from the bakery, made in fresh bread an imprint of the nut and the key of a padlock, with which a window in the bakery was locked in the hall where baked bread was stored. Jasiek's friend, a locksmith in the "Industriehof I" made a wrench for that nut. My former co-worker of TAP in Warsaw, ensign 28, made a key for the padlock. Both keys were ready in 24 hours. Jasiek succeeded to examine cautiously, whether they fit. The padlock key was made just in case, because, as Jasiek said, it was nearly impossible to open the window unnoticed.

But it was a very long way between making the key and going out. It was a small step on the way of our escape. First, we both should be placed the bakery and, as far as I was concerned, I could come there for a moment only as they would get to know at once that I was no professional, while the work of a pack-mule for transport of flour bags was manned and watched with jealousy by those who pretended to be bakers there. Additionally, the time of my stay in the bakery, if I got there, had to be very short, as it could not be exposed to the authorities of the parcel department where I had just been acknowledged indispensable and exempted from

transportation. A wilful change of one's commando suggested the authorities an idea of preparation of an escape, especially a transfer from so a good commando; in this way one could be quickly placed in the SK as was the case of Olek 167.

After some moments of deliberation of obstacles to be coped with in the way through the bakery, I thought again of the sewer way, which nevertheless had also some points difficult for acceptance... And I thought again of the bakery. At last, Jasiek and me decided firmly to go though the bakery. To remove the existing obstacles and to make all possible effort in order to be placed there on the night shift and – as I was concerned – for one night only. So, it was up to us to do that.

I did not tell anything, even to Jasiek, and I went to 92 whose colleague was then an “Arbeistdienst” after Mietek. Through him, not disclosing the final aim of that move, I settled the matter of Jasiek's assignment to the bakery, as I told he was in fact a baker by profession and, nobody knew why, he was wandering through various commandos, what was just improper for such old a number.

On the next day Jasiek ran to me to inform that he did not know how it was that he had got a notice of assignment to the bakery, that his capo was worried by his departure but somehow resigned himself to his fate. I told him from where the notice was, and Jasiek went to the bakery for good. After several days he was an “old” baker. The capo of the bakery, a Czech, was impressed by Jasiek due to his good humour and strength, appointed him his deputy, an unterkapo, and agreed with satisfaction that he himself would work in daytime, while Jasiek in the night.

CASES OF SEXUAL INTERCOURSE

There was only a few days left before Easter... We decided to take advantage of the holiday time as of a period, when among SS-men, capos and all the camp authorities, under the influence of vodka there was some kind of laxity and less watchfulness. In the past, for a smell of vodka from any of capos, Fritsch or Aumeier used to put them into the bunker, but then times changed. And now it was officially not allowed to drink vodka under the penalty of bunker, but similarly it was not allowed to have sexual intercourse with women under the penalty of not only bunker, but also a SK, but nevertheless there was some laxity in this respect also. Not only SS-men but also prisoners had sexual intercourse with German women in SS uniforms, who were the authorities of the women's camp, but who often were recruited from women of the street and prisoners, marching in columns from their work, exchanged telling signs with met SS-women. Some percent of those who used to have meetings got caught, and many prisoners, mainly capos and block supervisors, were placed in the bunker, having avoided the SK only due to their brand at the authorities. Among others, block supervisor 171 was placed in the bunker for similar delinquencies. Due to laxity in the camp, prisoners made permanent contacts with women. Couples were created along with some romantic stories. SS-men were also not free from such misdemeanour. From several months an unprecedented picture could be seen, as SS-men, their belts off, were led for a half-an-

hour walk twice a day from the bunker in our block 11. SS-men locked there for their intercourse with women.

Basically, for such misdemeanour as an intercourse with woman of the “inferior people” class, an SS-man was liable to much higher penalty – a special penal camp for SS-men, in which Palitsch himself was placed, sentenced for many years for his intercourse with Jewish girl Katti. But it was a much more future matter. For the time being, a milder penalty of the bunker was applied or they went unpunished. But it was also a conspiracy and selection of women in Rajsko by SS-men was kept strict secret in their circle. Additionally, the conscience of the commander of the camp was also weighed by some peccadillos. He was possessed by the “gold rush”. Scheming very cautiously with Erik in the tannery he used to collect gold, jewels and valuable things, and in case of a sharp punishment he could fear a revenge of the punished SS-man in the form of a report against him. So, he tried just not to notice any misdemeanour of his subordinates.

CASES OF “GOLD RUSH”

Instead, a “gold rush” disclosed with a prisoner nearly in every case resulted in his death, as after an inquiry in the bunker and a search of places indicated by the prisoner, an SS-man usually made him away, in order to remove a witness who could testify how many gold they had taken away from him. Here all died, regardless of their nationality. Also in this way two scoundrels, Germans, the block supervisor of block 22 and capo Walter.

EASTER TIME. FINAL PREPARATION

Second lieutenant 164 wished to go home with us, but he resigned due to his fear about his family. He gave us the address of his family in locality of Z. He wrote to them, to advise them discreetly, about a visit of somebody from him and he gave us an appointed password for his men and a contact with the organisation in the locality of Z.

In the parcel department I moved from the night shift to the daytime one. Easter fell on 25 April. The weather was fine, sunny. As usually in spring, when grass rose up from the ground and buds on trees changed into leaves and flowers, the most desired thing was to be released to freedom.

On the Holy Saturday of 24 April, in the parcel department I complained of a headache since morning. Who knew that my head was unable to ache? In the afternoon I did not go to work. In the block I complained of pain of joints and calves. When the block supervisor, a quite good-tempered German, always kind to workers of the parcel department, heard that I told sufficiently audibly to the room supervisor of my typical pains, said with concern: "Du hast Fleckfieber. Geh schnell zum Krankenbau!" I pretended my dislike to the hospital and, with ostensible reluctance, I went. In the hospital area I found Edek 57. I told him I had to be placed in the hospital as soon as on that day, best of all in the typhus block (he was store-keeper there) on condition he would facilitate my informal entry there (acceptance) and my

release after several days. Edek made up his mind quickly, in his work he always used to go to all lengths.

In the afternoon on the Holy Sunday the ambulance was not in operation. Edek himself settled all formalities connected with my acceptance through the ambulance (in block 28) to the typhus block and, taking advantage of the missing service, he personally introduced me as an ill person. Here, having avoided the usual procedure, the bath and handing over of my things, he placed me in a separate small room in the first storey, where I undressed and left my things in charge of a colleague appointed by Edek. Then he led me to the sick room in the first storey, which commander was 172. A bed was found for me and Edek left me in charge of 172, who remembered me from the time of my illness, typhus. Now he thought it was a typhus relapse, but because I did not look ill at all, he shook his head and, discreetly, he did not ask any questions, neither to me nor to Edek. I shook Edek's hand for a good-bye with gratitude and I declared that I had to go out the day after tomorrow, in the morning.

On Sunday, the first day of the holidays, the bakery did not operate, but on Monday it started its work again. So, I should leave and try to take up work on the day of its starting, then my arrival would be (a psychological aspect) less apparent and it would not be suspected to those who knew there was a change in the staff of the bakery in the time of the holidays.

In the night from Saturday to Sunday I slept in a room of block 20 and I had an unusual dream: I burst into some shed, where there is a beautiful horse; if I was not a cavalryman and I did not know horse colours, I would say white like milk. I quickly put the saddle on the dancing tethered horse, someone brings me a horse-cloth, I pull up the saddle-girths with my teeth (my fashion going back to 1919/1920), I jump on the saddle and I ride out of the shed. Though, I hankered after a horse very much.

Sunday, Easter. I am still lying in bed in block 20. From time to time Edek comes in to get to know if I need something. In the

afternoon I decided for a talk with Edek. Edek, transported here as a young boy, after two years of his stay in Oświęcim was getting on towards twenty. He was caught with a gun in his pocket. He thought he might not be released from Oświęcim any more. He used to tell me: "Mister Tomek, I count on you only..." So in the afternoon on Sunday I told him: "Edek, it's no use much talking, I am going out of the camp. Because you introduced me to the HKB, evading the formalities, and you are to evict me from the hospital tomorrow, acting very informally again, as without quarantine and, contrary to regulations, not to block 6 from which I came but to block 15, so, after my escape who will be given a crack on his sconce? You will. So I propose you to go out with me."

Edek deliberated for several minutes only. Then, he did not even asked about the way. He made a decision we should go together.

When soon afterwards Jasiek approached the window and told me I had to leave next day in the morning and be present in block 15, I told him that everything was o. k., but I would not go out alone, but with Edek. Janek clutched at his head, but after a while, when he was informed that Janek was a fine fellow, he reverted to his ever-good-humoured look and said: "Well, what to do."

In that evening, Edek made a row against block supervisor, that there was no place for Poles, that he did not wish to be here any longer and he was going out to the camp on the next day. The block supervisor, a German, liked Edek and began to appease him, telling he did not see any necessity for him to give us his good position of store-keeper and he would not let him go, as what was the use for him to be knocked about somewhere at work when he had little work while food at will here. But Edek was not open to conviction. He continued to declare he would not stay, as he was ill-treated as a Pole. At last the block supervisor was put out of patience and said: "Then, you fool, go where you wish!"

It was re-echoed in the room, in which I was in bed. In short time, room supervisors and flegers from all over the block hurried

to 172 and asked scrambling, what was about Edek that he gave up such a good position. Because it was seen that Edek would come to me, so it was asked whether he had told me why he was leaving the block. I replied – naturally, he is young, still thoughtless.

The night from Sunday to Monday I spent in the same bed and I dreamt of horses again. I dreamt that a cart, in which several of us, colleagues, were sitting, was drawn by a pair of horses, but before them there were three additional horses in the harness, “wporęcz”. The horses were going lively. Suddenly, the cart went into sticky mud. The horses were wading and drawing the cart with difficulty, but finally they drew it into a hard road and it began to roll on quickly.

Monday morning, the second day of the holidays. Edek brought a notice, “zettel”, which moved me to block 15. He also had such a notice to block 15. Colleague 173 helped Edek to issue such notices. I got up from bed, put on my dress again, which was in a small room next to the hall, and I went together with Edek to block 15. Here we entered the chancellery of the block, to report our arrival to block supervisor, a German. There was holiday-time atmosphere here. The block supervisor, evidently after a glass of vodka, was eagerly playing cards with capos. We stood at attention and reported in due form and quickly our assignment to that block. The block supervisor told in German:

— One can see at once, they’re old numbers. Nice to hear their report – he beamed. But suddenly he frowned. – Why to my block, you two?

— We are bakers.

— Well, bakers, that’s o.k. – the block supervisor told, while peeping at his cards. – But does the capo of the bakery know of that?

— Jawohl. We’ve already talked to capo. He’s accepted us to work.

We had not seen the capo of the bakery at all, but as we decided to lead all camp authorities into error, we followed that course resolutely.

— Well, give the Zettel and go to the room.

We left the notices of our transfer from block 20 into block 15 and went to the room into the environment of bakers. Jasiiek had been waiting for us in the room, but he purposefully had not approached us at once. We stood before capo and told we were bakers, we could work in a mechanical bakery (which was just to be put into operation) and we were moved as bakers to block 15 and the block supervisor knew us (to be true, he had got to know us a while before), that we were old numbers and we would not be a disgrace to his commando. Capo, who was sitting at a table, was apparently surprised and undecided, but before he had made up his mind, Jasiiek began to whisper to him and smile. Capo smiled also, but said nothing. Later, Jasiiek related to us, what he had told more or less: “Capo, they’re two fools, who’ve been taken in. They think they’ll eat a lot of bread in the bakery and it’s so light work there. Capo, give them to my night commando and I will put them through such a mill – he showed his big fist – that upon one night they’ll cease their wish for bakery.”

In the meantime, for the beginning of our acquaintance, we handed over some apples, sugar and candied fruits, which I had from a parcel sent me from home, to capo. Capo looked with smile at Jasiiek, then at the apple and sugar. Maybe he was assessing us, as he expected some parcels we could give him in future. Then he looked at us and said: “Well, we’ll try what bakers you are.”

A bell for a roll-call, which due to a holiday time sounded before 11 o’clock, broke out conversation with capo and delayed our confidence with Janek. The roll-call passed without any obstacles or confusion. For the time being, the number of the camp was balanced. As I stood in the row, I thought that if everything went on as we planned, it was my last roll-call in Oświęcim. And I calculated I had circa 2.5 thousand of them. What a wide scale for

comparisons – in various years, in various blocks. Well, policy in camp had been constantly getting milder.

After the roll-call, the three of us gathered in top beds of the bakers' room and talked aloud about neutral matters or about food parcels, as there were unknown prisoners around us. From time to time we communicated about our basic subject. Jasiek, who struck up a friendship with Edek at once, pretended that his interest of us was due to our holiday parcels. The point was to go to the bakery for the night as early as today, as the state of affairs we had created, having led the authorities into error, could not last for long. Additionally, I should not be visible to known prisoners of block 6 and to workers of the parcel department, because they had seen me in good health in the camp area and capo and chief of the parcel department would be interested in this information, upon which I might cast in my lot with Olek. Also, a conversation of the bakery capo with the block supervisor about our question could be expected and it would be disclosed that neither the former nor the latter knew us. So, we should act quickly and break the obstacles.

Eight bakers used to go to the bakery for the night shift. It was fixed that such number of prisoners were demanded in the bakery for the night. So it was written in the "Blockführerstube" in the gate and it could not be changed. Anyway, we were unable to change it. The night shift was manned by prisoners who did not wish to be replaced by others. A good side was that Jasiek had already been included in that shift, but two more places should be provided. How to persuade bakers and not to arouse suspicion, not to go to work for the night and to be replaced by us. They could fear we wanted to deprive them of their positions. Who knew, perhaps we were good bakers (we did not declare we were not) and capo would fire them out of the bakery and accept us for good. We explained that a mechanical bakery was to be opened and we all would be necessary. That we were old numbers and we had an opportunity to find another work, the more so because

they told it was not so well and easy at all, we would go one time only, we would see how the work was and would not like it any more – we would find another place. It is difficult to quote all arguments and ways used by us, but at the same time we had to pretend we were not keen very much, while offering them sugar, honey-cake and apples. We gave away all our parcels we had, except a small box of mead I received from home. We made very little progress.

We had concluded before that we could not return from the bakery, because first of all I (for a wilful change of my commando) would be placed in the SK; additionally, it would be disclosed in the bakery that we were not bakers, so we would not be taken to that work any more, while capo would fire us from the commando. But in order not to return, we had to go out before. Though, there was no place for us in the night shift.

About three o'clock in the afternoon, one of the bakers agreed at last to be replaced for that night, but we needed the second place. In the meantime, I was running to my friends for some things. I went very cautiously to block 6 to take things necessary for me, supposedly for ill colonel 40 (block 18a) who was informed of my plan. I changed my shoes twice in his place. I visited lieutenant 76 (block 27) who gave me warm underwear for our travel – dark-blue ski trousers, which we put on under our outer garments. Colleague 101 (block 28) gave me a dark-blue wind jacket for my journey.

Time was running short, while there was still no second place to the bakery. While I was running with long boots, which, tested, proved to be unfit, as they were uncomfortable, I nearly fell in with a senior of the camp. I left the boots in the corridor of block 25 by the door of block supervisor 80 and due to lack of time I could not come in to explain anything. While running out of block 25 I fell in with captain 1, to whom I heartily bid a farewell without any explanation. I changed my dress partially in block 22a in the presence of colonel 122, captain 60 and colleague 92. From

their top beds, watching my quick movements as I was putting on the wind jacket and ski trousers under my striped clothing, they shook their heads with emotion. Captain 60 told his favourable tag: “Uuugh, baaaadly”. Then I bade good-bye to my friend 59, who gave me some dollars and marks for my travel. I continued the preparations for my travel in the top bed of my friend 98, while officer-cadett 99 was sleeping as if nothing had happened, so I did not wake him up.

In block 15 we waited till five o'clock plus some minutes in the afternoon, until at last we found such a baker, who – whether he wished to have future friends of rich prisoners, “old numbers”, or wished to have some rest in the night – trusted us, that we would not do him brown to deprive him of his work, and agreed.

At six o'clock in the afternoon we were ready. Jasiiek changed in civilian dress, which I had contrived to get for him some time before, because he, as an untercapo, was allowed to go to work in civilian clothes. Along his back, in his waist and on trousers he had wide bright stripes painted in red. Naturally, nobody knew that those stripes had been painted by colleague 118, who solved powder paint in water instead in varnish.

IN THE BAKERY

At 6:20 p.m. an SS-man in the gate called in a loud voice “Bäckerei!” Upon this signal we all, assigned to the night shift in the bakery, ran out of block 15 and rushed towards the gate. The day was sunny, the camp was keeping the holiday and prisoners were taking a walk. On my run from the block to the gate I met several colleagues, who looked at me in utter surprise, to where I was running together with bakers when I had so a good job in the parcel department. I recognised the faces of lieutenant 20 and second lieutenant 174 but I did not afraid of them. I smiled to them, as they were my friends.

Before the gate we dressed in two rows to march out. Up to the very end we were not sure if some of the bakers, who had given up their places for us, would not change his mind and run to the gate. Then some of us, newcomers, would have to stay. We both would have to go alone, because even if we wanted to withdraw, it could not be done from before the gate. But, in total, eight of us stood in place, as many as it was required. We were encircled by 5 SS-men. While counting us through a counter window of the “Blockführerstube” the Scharführer tossed to our escort: “Paßt auf!” Was that they guessed anything? The reason was different. It was Monday, the day in which an escort of the bakers was always changed, to assume that duty for a whole week.

We set off.

I thought, how many times I had crossed that gate, but never like then. I knew I could not return in any case. It sufficed to feel joy and a kind of wings. But it was a long way to my take-off.

We were marching by a road next to the tannery. I was not here for a long time. Passing by, I had a look at the buildings, the yard, my thoughts wandered back to the work of mine and my colleagues, part of whom was already dead.

In the place where the road, by which we had been going from the camp, met another one, by which homes of the town were placed, we divided in two units. Two bakers and as many as three SS-men went by the road to the right, in the direction of a bridge, into the small bakery. A disproportionately large escort for those two and a small one for us, as only two SS-men went with the six of us, was due to that those three SS-men were contriving to hold some holiday drinking bout.

We marched to the left. At last we saw the great bakery, the daytime shift of bakers who met us while going out, a large, sinister, metal-clad door, and the place of struggle for our life during that night.

Having entered the bakery, we went left – cola was stored in a separate room. There we left our things and we wholly undressed due to high temperature.

It was quite dark there. We arranged each one's things separately, dividing them into those, which should be taken and those we should leave – our striped clothing.

From two our SS-man, one, smaller, as if he had a presentiment, began at once to scrutinise the entry door, to shake his head and tell they were not safe enough. The eloquent Jasio began to persuade him with smile, it was just on the contrary. Heavy, metal-clad door were barred with a large lock, a key for which the SS-man carried by his belt, a second stand-by key was hanged in a recess of the wall behind a glass, which should be broken to take out the key. Suspiciousness of the SS-man was perhaps caused by presentiment but also by sense of duty, which the new guard

wanted to show from the first day. Monday was not a convenient day in this respect. In the end of a week, SS-men were accustomed to their workers and were inattentive, not so watchful.

The shift of the guard into new one had such an advantage, that they came here as we and Edek did, for the first time, and they did not know we were newcomers, so they made no difference between us and other prisoners in observation.

What did we do in the bakery? The baking of bread was guided by civilian bakers, who came here from the town and also worked in two shifts. During a night they had to bake an ordered amount of bread loafs. A team of bakers who failed to make the due number of loafs during their work – went to the bunker – the civilian bakers and prisoners together. So it was a vehement rush at work. During the night we had to make five batches, to put bread in all ovens five times and take it out five times also.

We planned to try to go out of the bakery after the second batch, as after the first one it was too early. Nevertheless the first, second, third and fourth batch of bread had passed and we were still unable to go out of the bakery. As in solitaire, when cards must be properly arranged and you must move them from one place to another and shuffle so that the solitaire should work, also here the crossing runs of bakers hurrying for flour, sawdust, coal, water, transporting ready loafs, resulted in mutually crossed routes in various directions and additionally tangled by supervising SS-men who followed us, had to got arranged in such a way to enable us in some moment to come near the door while not taken by the sight of SS-men or bakers. The stake of that solitaire was our life.

We were locked in the bakery due to the necessity to do some work, which had to be done quickly and we must not have hampered the course of work of other bakers. We were bathed in sweat, due to great heat. We drank water almost by buckets. We tried to put the vigilance of SS-men to sleep by making an impression we were busy with our work only. In our eyes we were like struggling animals locked in a cage and using all their smartness to arrange

conditions of going out of the cage, necessary to be done as soon as in that night. Hours were passing by. The solitaire was getting more and more tangled, it failed to work, it was still not feasible to go out. Our chances would increase and decrease. Tension of our nerves abated, then grew up by turns.

The door was within our sight The SS-men would walk forward and backward, approaching the door itself. It was impossible to open the padlocked window, as somebody was busy close to it all the time. When Monday was over and Tuesday began since midnight, the atmosphere was relaxed to a certain degree. One of SS-men lay down and was sleeping or pretending that he was sleeping, anyway he did not walk. All bakers were tired also. When about two o'clock, the fourth batch was ready and there remained one batch to be done, the bakers paused for longer time and began to eat.

We three were uneasy. Janek was putting on his clothes in secret. Edek and I masked his movements, as if out of our zeal we carried coal or water, preparing them for baking of the final batch. In fact, we were preparing for our final effort – the accomplishment of our going out. In some moment, when an SS-man was walking from the door in the direction of the hall, Jasio quickly unscrewed the nut, which easily gave in to Jasio's iron hands, and he pushed out the screw together with the hook, which fell down behind the door. On SS-man's way back, Jasio disappeared in the coal chamber. We were going with wheel-barrows to fetch coal. In the next turn of SS-man's wandering from the door, when he was turned back, Jasio drew off quickly and noiselessly two upper and two lower bars. We, while running with out wheel-barrows, curtained the door by turns. The bakers, tired, were sitting or lying, all of them, in the large hall. The bars took more time than the nut. Dressed Jasiek, already in the eyes of the SS-man, entered the toilet located just next to the door. The SS-man did not pay any attention to that he was dressed, maybe, as a new one he thought it was normal close to the morning.

Until then, all seemed to go smoothly. Suddenly, an unexpected thing occurred. The SS-man, having some presentiment or just thoughtlessly, approached the door, stood by it, his face perhaps half meter from it, and began to scrutinise it. I put aside my wheelbarrow, although I was some 4 meters behind him. Also Edek was petrified with fear next to a heap of coal. We both awaited a loud shout of the SS-man as a sign to assail and tie him. Why he did not notice anything? Were his eyes open at all, or he only was dreaming of something – later I could not understand it. I guess that he also must have racked his brain over it on the next day in the bunker. He turned back from the door and marched quietly towards the ovens. When he was about 6 meters from the door, Jasiiek slipped out of the toilet while I popped for our things, and one second later me and Jasio were pressing vehemently upon the door. In that moment Edek, just behind the back of one SS-man, ran with a knife quickly and noiselessly towards the bed with the second sleeping SS-man and... having cut the cables in two places, he took a piece of them for a keepsake! In the meantime, the door pressed by us was bending in bow but it still did not give way. The SS-man was slowly walking off; he was 8 meters from us, after a while – 9 meters. We increased our pressure upon the door, which got bent even more but still it did not give. In that time Edek jumped from the bed of the SS-man to fetch his things arranged in the coal chamber. Janek redoubled his effort, as far as I was concerned, the tension of my nerves was redoubled – yet the door seemed stronger than us. We were putting all possible effort to the utmost of our ability in our pressure upon the door, when, suddenly... abruptly and noiselessly it came open before us. A chill wind flowed upon our flushed heads, stars began to shine in the sky as if they winked to us. All that was done just in an instant.

OUR "TAKE-OFF"

A jump into a dark space and run in the sequence: Jasiek, me, Edek. In the same time, shots were fired behind us. How fast we were running, it is hard to describe. The bullets did not touch us. We were tearing the air into rags by quick movements of our hands.

When we were about one hundred meters from the bakery, we began to cry: "Jasiek, Jasiek...", but Jasiek was speeding forward like a race-horse. If I were able to overtake him, to catch hold of his arm. The distance between all three of us was unchanged, we were rushing at steady speed.

There were ten shots behind us. Then there was silence. Probably the SS-man rushed to the telephone. That one, who was sleeping, was surely fully bewildered for the first minute.

I wished to stop Jasiek, as I planned the direction of our escape to be square to that one, along which we were just running. I managed to do it after about 200-300 meters. Jasiek slowed down and I caught up with him, Edek ran up to us also.

- Well, what now? – Jasio asked, panting.
- Rather nothing at now – I replied.
- You told you had a plan of our further course?

That was true, I had a plan. I was to cross the Soła river and to go along the other bank of the river in the opposite direction – just towards the camp and then further on, towards Kęty. But Jasiek's run to the north changed everything. It was too late to

turn back. Two o'clock in the morning had passed. We should be in a hurry.

— So, what now? – my colleagues asked.

— Nothing. Let's dress up. – I said. – I will lead you further.

We two were nearly in bathing-drawers only, bundles of our clothes under our arms. So far we were running at some distance from the river, but along Soła to the north. Then, having changed and having left our striped trousers, taken by mistake, in bushes, I led us just to the river bank (the left one), and along the bank, in bushes, farther north. Edek, asked if he had the pack of powdered tobacco said, he had got it but it all was spilled upon our run. If they took dogs to trail us, they would breathe in enough that snuff. I dried that tobacco and ground it into snuff very long before, when I worked in the spoon shop, from where we planned to prepare an escape of our colleagues. At present it was spilled out too quickly, but anyway it could cover up our traces.

Not changing the already taken direction to the north, we had a bifurcation of Soła river before us. Soła flowed into Wisła, but additionally there was a railway bridge across Soła to the left, according to our information, guarded by a sentinel.

— Tomek, where are you going? – Jasio asked.

— Don't say anything. We have no other way and we have not much time. We are going the shortest possible way.

We were approaching the bridge. I was going first, we had rubber soles. Jasio was following me by 10-15 steps, and Edek in the end. Cautiously, watching the sentry-box on the left side of the bridge abutment, I ascended the railway bank and bridge. The colleagues followed me. Treading softly, we were yet moving along the bridge quickly. We passed one third of it, then one half, were approaching the opposite river-bank, the end of the bridge... Until then we were going without any obstacles... At last, when the bridge had ended, we jumped quickly aside to the left, from the bank into a mead or field. Unexpectedly for us, we passed

the bridge unhindered. The sentries apparently were amusing themselves in a better company during the holidays.

Farther off, on the left side of the railway track, I took a direction to the east, along Wisła. It was easy to find our way, the sky was full of sparkling stars. We already felt free in some measure. The danger still separated us from full sense of freedom.

We began to run across country. On the right side the town of Oświęcim was left. We jumped above some ditches, we crossed some roads, ran across ploughed fields and meadows, we were running up and away Wisła depending on the bends of the river. It was later that we could contemplate how much a man was able to withstand, when all his nerves were at work. We would ascend ploughed fields sloping up, slide down some concrete-reinforced slopes, mounted the edges of some regulated canals. A train overtook and passed us, as we were going along the railway tracks.

At last, after several kilometres – as it seemed to us then – ten kilometres, but in fact a bit less, from behind a height we saw before us, in our way, some fences, huts, towers and wires... The camp was placed before us and the creeping reflector lights so well know to us. In the first moment we stood dumbfounded. But in the next one we came to the conclusion it was a branch of our camp, the so-called Buna.

We had no time to change our route. The sky was already coloured by dawn. We began to bypass the camp from the left side. We faced the wires. We again began to slip down and toil up some slopes. We would cross canals on footbridges. In some place, we cautiously walked along a footbridge, under which foamed water was flowing. We passed by wires, wading round them in water. At last also this camp was behind us.

We ran up (we were still capable of running) the riverside of Wisła and we began to move on along it, while looking for some places to hide in daytime just in case.

Day was dawning. There was no major cover for us. A forest appeared like a thin black strip far away, on the horizon line. It was full day already. Close by, at the riverside of Wisła, a village was placed. Boats were swinging in the water, a property of inhabitants of that village. I decided to come across the Wisła river in a boat. The boats were tied with chains to pales set up in the ground. The chains were padlocked. We examined the chains. One of them was combined of two sections joined by a screw. Janek took out his wrench (a piece of metal bar with a nut hole), by which he had unscrewed the nut in the bakery. We were surprised again by a coincidence. The wrench was just fit for the nut. We unscrewed the nut, the chain got divided in two.

The sun was just rising. We boarded the boat and shoved off. Any time somebody could go out of homes of the village, at the distance of mere several dozens steps from us. Ten to twenty meters before the opposite riverside the boat came up against a shallow. We had no time to push it back. We jumped into water and waded by foot, waist-deep in water. Our bodies and joints, hot after the whole night, responded. For now, we felt nothing, as we quickly jumped to the riverside of Wisła.

In the distance of two kilometres from us there was the dark strip of a forest. Forest – which I so loved, to which I had longed for several years, was a salvation in this case, was the first real cover in the area, that could hide us. It cannot be told we ran towards our salvation, we had no strength to run already. We marched quickly, but from time to time we slowed our pace due to lack of strength.

The sun was shining brightly. From a distance, the throb of motorcycles on roads could be heard, maybe in pursuit of us. We were walking slowly. Clothes of Edek and me, from short distance maybe suspected a bit, from a long one could pass as dark, not distinguished profiles. Instead, the beautiful, civilian suit of Jasio struck from afar with its terribly glaring red stripes.

Some people working in the field were visible from afar. They must have seen us. We were approaching the forest slowly. Strange – for the first time in my life I smelled the forest at a distance of nearly one hundred meters. A powerful fragrance reached our senses, a very nice twitter of birds, a whiff of moisture, a smell of resin. Our sight penetrated the close mysteriousness of the wood. We entered behind the first dozen of trees and lay down on soft moss. Lying on my back, I sent up my thought above three-tops, and it furlled into a big question mark. A metamorphosis. What a contrast to the camp, in which, as it seemed, we had lived one thousand years.

Pine trees were sighing, slightly swinging the huge caps of their tops. Some scraps of the sky appeared in blue between tree boughs. Jewels of dew were shining on bush leaves and on the grass. The sun penetrated in some places by its golden beams, lighting up the life of thousands of small creatures – the world of small beetles, gnats and butterflies. The world of birds, like thousands years before, continued to form up groups, to flock together, to be vibrant of its own life. Nevertheless, despite so many sounds, there was silence here, a vast silence, silence isolated from human clamour, from all human scurvy tricks, a silence in which man was not present. We did not come into account. We just were returning on the Earth. We only expected to be included in the company of people. How glad we were, we had not seen them till that time. We decided to keep as far from them as possible, until it was possible.

But it was difficult to persist without people very long. We had no food. At then we were not hungry very much, we ate hare lettuce, we drank water from a brook.

We were delighted by everything. We felt the entire world as lovely. Except for people. I had a box of mead, sent me from home, as well as a spoon. I treated my friends and myself by turn, one spoon for each of us.

Lying, we talked about the occurrences of that night. Jasio was bald, so he did not need any cap. Edek's and my hairs were cut down. To conceal the absence of our hairs, we had taken from the bakery, from things of bakers, two civilian caps, but Edek lost his one during our run across the bushes in the night. So he tied a shawl on his head. Therefore we called him: Ewunia. In turn, Jasio called himself: Adam, and looking at some green branch he took his surname: Gałązka. It beautifully corresponded to his 90 kg of weight.

Having washed, by Jasio, the red stripes on his suit in a brook and having dried four bank-notes wetted in mud by me, we continued our march eastwards, going through forests, passing quickly across some small open areas and passing by larger ones along the edge of forests. Our principle was – to keep clear of people.

Just before the evening we had a small incident with a gamekeeper, who saw us from a distance when we were eating the rest of our mead and, wishing to detain us, he barred our way. Then I went into an area of young trees, which had grown here in the proper time and were so dense it was possible to move creeping only. In that area I ordered to change our direction and we left it by a road. We jumped the road and concealed ourselves in a young-tree area again. The gamekeeper lost our trail, we adhered to the road as it ran, as per inscriptions on road posts, to the locality of Z., which was on the line of our route. We approached that locality after the sunset. There were ruins of a castle raised on a hill before the locality. We bypassed an open area before the locality from left side, crossed a road among homes and went to the wooded hill just to the ruins of the castle. Here on hill slope, we lay down terribly tired, into last-year's leaves in order to sleep... So it came Tuesday, 27 April.

Edek fell asleep at once. Jasiiek and I suffered inflammation of joints after our cold bath and, in addition, I suffered an inflammation of the sciatic nerve. The last hour of our march I overcame only due to my strength of will. Apart from pain in my right hip,

I suffered an ache of my knee joints, especially severe while going down slopes, when I trod with my teeth clenched. Then as I was lying, I suffered less pain, but it still troubled me. Jasiiek, lying, did not feel pain and also fell asleep. I could not sleep. Making use of it, I began to consider what to do next.

Eight kilometres from here there was the border between Silesia annexed by Third Reich and the General Government, through which we had to get. I was making plans for long hours, half-dosing, how to get there, how to cross the border and where to go next. Suddenly, I was brightened by a salutary thought – I actually sat down and hissed of pain. I remembered the year 1942. My work in the spoon shop, where my colleague 19 took the position of clerk, with whom I used to talk very frankly. He told me to whom he wrote his letters, that his uncle was priest just by the border, that his parish was located on both sides of the border and the parish-priest used to travel abroad and he might travel with his coachman, whom he was allowed to leave abroad... there were 7 or 8 kilometres to the locality, where my friend's relative was parish-priest.

Edek began to talk something in his sleep, indistinctly in the beginning, but later he was asking a certain Bronek, whether he had fetched bread for him (he was hungry, he was dreaming of food in the night). Suddenly he started up from his shakedown and asked aloud, so that Janek awoke: "Now, has he fetched some bread?"

— Who was to fetch bread?

— Well, Bronek was...

— Keep quiet, my dear. You see here's a forest, a castle and we are sleeping on leaves. It was a dream.

Edek lay down. But then I rose up. It was four o'clock. I decided to reach the priest in the morning. We had few kilometres but aching joints. For me, with an ache of my knees, it was hard for me to move my legs. Jasiiek stood up lingering, but staggered and began to slide down the hill slope. He almost fainted, out of

ache of his joints. But we managed to control ourselves. Our first steps were hard and painful, especially coming down the slope. Dodging a bit, we passed the distance in quite a long time. In the beginning very slowly, then a bit faster.

Jasiek, to find out some information, as a person most decently dressed, who did not need to conceal the absence of hairs on his bald head, approached a peasant going to work and chattered for a while, going along with him.

We approached the locality II. A small church was visible on a wooded hill.

Jasiek left the peasant, joined us and informed that the locality in question was just the area of the church hill. Picking our way between the fields, we reached a road, by which a custom office was located. The border itself was farther off, on a hill. It was 7 o'clock a.m. There were several people in the office, who gave some searching looks at us from a distance. But we crossed the road, then some brook by a small bridge and continued to walk in full view of the people, trying to walk at a lively pace and cheerfully. At last we reached the wooded hill and having gone up its slope, we fell upon the ground, terribly tired. And as if waiting for us, it sounded out the bell of the church, which was placed just close by, on the top of the hill.

— It can't be helped, Jasio, dear brother, you must go to the church. You look like a human creature and of our three only you may be present in church, as you can walk without cap. I sent Jasiek to the priest, to whom he should tell we had been together, there in hell, with priest's brother Franciszek and his two sons: Tadek and Lolek.

Jasio went off and did not return for long. At last, he came back uncertain and told us he had waited for the priest in church as he was to celebrate mess and talked to him, but the priest did not believe we had succeeded to escape Oświęcim, and he declared right out, that he feared some trap. I think, when he saw Jasiek's mouth smiled from ear to ear, it was hard to him, as he heard of

Oświęcim, to believe at once that Jasiek had been there for more than two and half years. And that he succeeded to escape.

I sent Jasio again, as the mess might come to an end, and I instructed him in detail, which relative lived in which block, where his nephews went, in which block his father met them, and what they wrote in their letters for last Christmas.... Jasio went off. The mess was ended. Jasio told everything to the priest, adding that two his colleagues were lying in bushes, as they cannot come in due to their hairs and odd dress. The priest believed and came together with Jasio to us. Here he wrung his hands above us. He finally believed in all. He began to visit us every half an hour in our bushes and he brought us milk, coffee, bread rolls, bread, sugar, butter and other dainties. It turned out he was not at all the same priest, whom we had in mind – that one was also here, but two kilometres away. This parish-priest knew that one and the whole history of his family, which was locked in Oświęcim. He could not accept us under his roof, as too many people went constantly here and there in his yard. We felt very well here, among young spruce trees and shrubs. The priest gave us some medicine for rub our joints. We wrote here first letters to our families, sent by the priest.

In the evening, when it was getting completely dark, the priest gave us a good guide. However, there are still good people in the world – we told to ourselves then. Thus Wednesday 28 April was ended.

We bade the priest good-bye. Our knee joints were aching less. We set off in the evening at 10 o'clock, to cross the border. The guide led us for a long time, dodging, then indicated us the place and said: "It is best here!" He withdrew.

It was possible that it was most safely here, the area was blocked by cut trees, wires and also cut by ditches, so the border guard supposed that nobody was able to go here and it watched other sectors.

We passed a band 150 meters wide after an hour only. Then we walked quickly, through differentiated areas, we mainly adhered a road. It was dark night. We were not in danger to be recognised from a distance. We could only meet a patrol, but our watchfulness and some animal instinct guided us successfully till now. Sometimes, when the road took a direction not suitable for us, we turned back and went across country, found our way by the stars, while wading across forests, falling into ravines, climbing up slopes. During the night we left behind us, as it seemed, a large area.

The first twilight met us in some large village, which stretched for kilometres. The road in the village turned left. Our direction was to the right, askew. As we noticed a small group of people, the first ones on that day, we turned right and went on by fields and then by meadows.

The sun rose. It was Thursday. The area was completely open. It was risky to move in daytime. We found a huge bush and spent the whole day in it, but it was impossible to sleep because it was placed on wet soil and it was difficult to fall asleep while sitting on a stone or on bush branches. In the evening, when the sun had set but it was still light, Jasiek set off for a reconnaissance in the direction of our march. He reappeared soon with an information that there was Wisła in the neighbourhood on the right side and, if we wished to keep our course we had followed till now, we should swim across the river. There were boats and a ferryman who could carry us to the other bank.

We decided to cross the river in the boat of the ferryman. We approached the river. The ferryman eyed us up and down. We entered the boat. The boat shoved off. We landed successfully on the other side. When we paid in marks, the ferryman looked at us even more strangely.

Before us there was III and the town of IV itself. We were walking by the main road, along the locality. People were returning home from work. Late cows were hurried to farms. Peasants, who

stood by their houses, looked at us curiously. We desired to eat and drink something hot very much. Nights were cold. My last sleep was from Sunday to Monday in the hospital in Oświęcim, but now we did not decide to enter homes, to approach people. In the end of the town, on the left side, some older man stood by the gate of his house and looked at us. His whole figure was so friendly, that I told Edek to ask him for milk. Edek approached him and asked if he could buy some milk. The householder began to wave his hand and invite to his home, speaking: "Come, come, I will give you milk". It was something in his voice, which was alarming, but he looked so honestly that we decided to enter his house.

When he introduced his family, wife and children, then he stood before us and said: "I will ask no questions, but please do not walk in this way." Then he explained he had experienced much during the previous war; that he did not wish to know anything. He fed us with noodles, eggs, bread and hot milk, then proposed an accommodation in his barn, where he would lock us.

— I know – he told – that you do not know me and you can be afraid of me, so I do not insist, but if you trust me, then stay and don't worry.

He had such a face, eyes and all his appearance so honest, that we stayed. In the night, locked up in the barn, under lock and key again, we slept quietly nevertheless on a true pillow, unseen for years. So Thursday 29 April was ended.

In the morning the housekeeper himself unlocked us, without any gendarmes. He gave us food and drink. We talked to our hearts' content. We exchanged money. He was a true and honest Pole, a patriot. So there are such people in the world. His name was 175. His whole family entertained us very heartily. We told where we were going. We again wrote letters to our families. Of course, not to the addresses known to the authorities of Oświęcim.

After breakfast, we went on – by fields, forests, leaving V and VI from the left side. Then we went towards VII. In the night from

Friday to Saturday we slept in a cottage, which stood single in the field, where a young married couple with children lived. We came lately; we went off before they had got up in the morning. We paid, thanked and went on. We bypassed VII and went in the direction of forests VIII.

It was Saturday, 1 May, when we entered the resin-fragrant forests. The weather was fine; the sun put down golden spots of light on the ground strewn with needles. Squirrels were climbing up; roe-deers were running by. Edek and me were leading by turns. Edek formed our rearguard. The day had been passing without any occurrence until then. We were hungry.

In the afternoon, since 2:00 p. m. Jasio was leading us. We entered a wide road, which ran in the direction suitable for us. About 4:00 o'clock we approached some old brook, upon which there was a bridge. Behind the bridge there were some buildings, from the left – a gamekeeper's house and several sheds, from the right – other buildings. Jasio went courageously to the bridge and the gamekeeper's house. We had succeeded in everything too long, so we were no longer cautious. We were led into error by that there was no bustle visible and green-painted shutters of the house were all closed.

While going past the gamekeeper's house, we looked at the yard, which was behind it and extended up to the sheds. A German soldier was marching along the yard towards the road and us (maybe a gendarme) with a rifle in his hand. To outward seeming, externally, we did not respond at all, in order to continue our march as long as possible, as we were about 10 steps from the house. All our response in that moment was inside us. The gendarme responded otherwise: "Halt!" but we continued our march as if we did not hear. – Halt – sounded again behind us together with a clang of the rifle being loaded. We all stopped quietly, our faces smiled. The soldier was behind the fence of the yard, maybe 30-35 steps from us. Next soldier went out quickly of

a shed at a distance of 50 meters. So we told: “Ja, ja, alles gut” and we quietly turned back towards them.

Having seen our composure, the former soldier, who had his weapon loaded, let his rifle down. Then, as I saw that, I told quietly: “Boys, bolt!” And we all dashed in various sides, to escape. Jasiek to the right, square to the course of our march, Edek along the road, in the direction of our march, in the ditch, while me to the right askew between them. How we were running, it is difficult to describe. Each one ran as he could. I jumped over trunks, fence of a nursery, bushes. Shots were fired at us many times, it whistled close to our ears often. In some moment I felt, maybe in my sub-consciousness, that somebody was aiming at me. Something gave a jerk at my right arm. I thought that the cad had hit the mark, but I did not felt any pain. I continued to run. I was hastening quickly away. I saw Edek, from the left side, far away. I cried to him. He noticed me and we began to come near, while running in common direction. We were a good 400 meters from the gamekeeper’s house and those ones still continued shooting. Because they could not see us, I guessed they were shooting at Jasiek... perhaps they killed him...

In the meantime, Edek and me sat in the pit of a fallen tree. I had to dress my wound, bleeding a little. My right arm was transfixed by bullet, bone not touched. Additionally, bullets had brushed my clothes. My trousers and jacket were transfixed in four places. Edek suggested remaining in the pit, but I judged it would be better to leave this area quickly, as Germans could communicate by phone and make a larger hunt. Having tied the wound with a handkerchief, Edek and me set off to the east. I thought Jasiek could be in a mess, as shots had been fired in his direction for a long time.

An hour later we came to a village, where we told straightforward we were “forest boys”, that there had been three of us, then two. They heard the shots, maybe our friend was killed... Those honest people gave us milk and bread, and also a guide who led

us to a ferry. We crossed a small river in the ferry and came to some larger village. Here we again met German soldiers, but they were looking for food in the village and paid no attention to us, as they probably thought we were local inhabitants.

Then, having left that village, we saw from afar the locality of IX, the first aim of our march. Nevertheless the flat of family of 164 was on the other side of the town and it was half past seven in the evening (curfew began here from 8 p.m.) I did not want to go through the city because of our appearance, so we spent the night in the garret of one housekeeper whose house we approached while bypassing the town from north and east.

In the evening, on Sunday, 2 May, we set off on an at last not long journey to family 176. We approached their home and saw a lady and a gentleman of older age, the parents in law of 164, as well as a young lady – his wife and his daughter Marysia. The master and mistress, smile on their faces, welcomed us politely and, asking no questions, invited us to their home. In the home we introduced ourselves as colleagues of 164. Master and mistress invited us to the rooms, where, having opened the door of one room, we saw in the bed.... Jasio, sleeping soundly. Having woken him up, we hugged each other.

Jasio, decently dressed, crossed the town as early as the day before in the evening and turned up here. That was the reason why the mister and mistress – informed by Jasio of our arrival – did not tell us anything when they invited us with smile to their home.

Jasio's clothes plus a bundle, which he carried under his arm, were transfixing by bullets in several places but he was not wounded at all. My wound was not dangerous. So we all were lucky.

With mister and mistress 176 and with lady 177 we experienced as much heartiness and hospitality, as one might experience in his own home after a long departure. Here we should repeat several times a day, there are still good people in this world...

Relations of experiences of Oświęcim common to us and our friend and their loved one, 164, were heard with great interest, hearty feelings and kindness. When we became familiar and got confidence, having exchanged the appointed passwords, I asked for contact with someone of the military organisation. Several hours later, I was talking to Leon 178, whom, upon an exchange of passwords, I asked for a contact with chief of the local outpost. Colleague Leon gave me an opportunity to communicate two gentlemen. One of them was from a north region IX, another one of southern region, lived 7 kilometres from there, in locality X. I told it did not matter, so Leon suggested to go rather to the commander in the locality X, as he was his friend.

I was guest of Mr and Mrs 176 for Sunday and Monday. On Tuesday (4 May) in the morning, dressed in decent clothes of colleague Leon, I was walking by him to X. Jasio and Edek still remained with Mr and Mrs 176, thanks to their kindness.

The day was fine, sunny. We walked and conversed merrily. Leon led a bicycle, on which he was to return home, as he thought the commander of the outpost would keep me as a guest in his place. While walking, I thought how many sensations and tragedies I had had in previous years and indeed they had all ended. Meanwhile, fate prepared a great, this time sensational surprise for me.

About midway, in a forest, we sat on stumps to have a rest. I asked Leon, out of curiosity, what was the name of the commander of the outpost, to whom we were going, because anyway I would get to know him soon. Leon told two words: given name and surname... Two words... Quite usual words for others, for me they were shockingly unusual words. It was an unusual and weird occurrence, a strange coincidence... The name of the commander of the outpost was the same, as the name I used in Oświęcim. So I was in that hell for so many days under his name, and he knew nothing of it. And it was now, when my road was leading me to him, the owner of that surname.

Was it fate? Blind fate? If actually it was fate, it was for sure not blind.

I got out of breath, I stopped speaking while Leon asked: “Why are you silent?” – Oh, nothing, I got tired a bit.

I was just calculating how many days I had been in Oświęcim. There were 947 of them in that hell behind wires. Nearly one thousand of them.

— Let’s go swiftly – I said – You and the commander are in for some unusual surprise.

— If so, let’s go.

We approached the beautiful locality of X, located in downs and hills, with a beautiful castle in a hill. While walking, I thought: well, it was here in IX where I had been born fictitiously. It was here, where 158 had arrived in the past, to settle my matter with priest 160.

In the veranda of a small house placed in a garden there sat some gentleman with wife and small daughters. We approached them. Colleague Leon whispered to him he could speak openly. Upon introduction, I gave the surname I had used in Oświęcim. He answered: “I am also...”

— But I am Tomasz – I added.

— I am also Tomasz – he replied astonished.

Colleague Leon listened to that conversation astounded. The mistress scrutinised me also.

— But I was born – here I quoted the day, month and year, which I had to repeat so many times in Oświęcim upon each change of block or commando, upon registrations made by capos.

The mister very nearly jumped to his feet.

— Is it possible? They are my data!

— Well, they are your data, but I experienced much more than you, while using them – and I related him that I had been locked in Oświęcim for two years and seven months, and then I escaped from there.

Various people might respond in various ways. My namesake and owner of the surname, which seemed to be mine for so many days, opened his arms. We kissed heartily and became friends at once.

— But how it was? – he asked.

I asked him, did he know Mrs doctor 83 of Warsaw? Yes. Did he live there? Yes. An identity card was being made for him there, he had departed before the card was ready. Then I made use of this card as one of several sham cards I had in that time.

I lived with Mr and Mrs 170 for 3.5 months. Through our friends we sent a message to priest 160 to erase the data previously written in pencil by the surname of my namesake in the public register book, so necessary in that time.

Here I organised a unit with the help of 84 and 180 as I wanted, if the acceptance of my plan arrived from Warsaw, to attack Oświęcim in co-ordination with our colleagues in the camp. With colleague 180 we had some weapon and German uniforms. I wrote a letter to my family, to friend 25, who had left Oświęcim by escape, with a report, and then was in Warsaw and worked in one of departments of the Headquarters. I wrote a letter to IX to 44 who was also sent from Oświęcim and also by escape, as I wanted to make contacts for our work.

On 1 June my friend 25 came from Warsaw as on wings of wind and he carried valuable information, that Miss E.O., to whom I had written letters from Oświęcim, still lived safely in that flat. Gestapo used to threaten with responsibility to one's family only. They had no reason or interest to come to intervene with a person who was only an acquaintance in their estimation. They had no trace of my family and did not know the surname.

25 carried me also an identity card and money. I discussed the matter with him, I explained that for the time being I would not go to Warsaw, as long as I hoped I would be soon allowed to attack Oświęcim from the outside. If there was a clear order – then I would go to Warsaw. My friend, a bit worried that he was

to return alone despite he had promised my family to carry me with him, departed to Warsaw.

On 5 June a local Gestapo man and an SS-man from Oświęcim came to Tomek's mother (my namesake) and asked the mistress, where her son was. She replied he had lived in the neighbourhood for many years. They arrived to Tomek. I was then very close by. The SS-man was apparently informed by the local Gestapo man that 84 had lived here for long time. He just looked at his face and at a paper hold in his hand (probably he compared my photo with stuffed cheeks), asked if there would be fruits in autumn, and went away.

During my work in X I met first-class people and valuable Poles, apart from Mr and Mrs 179 also Mr 181.

Then my friend 25 sent a parcel from Warsaw, with modern means of struggle against the invader and a letter, in which he wrote that in Warsaw the attitude was very favourable not to the attack on Oświęcim (what I had hoped), but to a decoration of me for my work in Oświęcim. My fiend still hoped that the question of our action would be settled positively. Meanwhile, in July I received a letter with a tragic information of the arrest of general Grot. Due to a bit hectic atmosphere in Warsaw I understood I could not expect an answer in the Oświęcim question and I decided to go to Warsaw.

Part VI

EPILOGUE

BACK IN WARSAW. CONSPIRACY. ASSISTANCE
FOR OŚWIĘCIM PRISONERS' FAMILIES. MEETING
MY COLLEAGUES FROM OŚWIĘCIM

On 23 August I was in Warsaw. In September Jasio came to Warsaw, in December – Edek. I worked in Warsaw in one of the cells of the Headquarters. I submitted, to relevant instances, the question of colleagues left in Oświęcim with the need to put up a proper organisation there. I was informed that 161, while he was kept in Pawiak, gave away the head of the organisation in Oświęcim, that he agreed to work for Germans. He was released from Pawiak and was going about in Warsaw with a revolver in his pocket, soon he was [unreadable text] ięcim. I knew he was a scoundrel, but even if I wished to change anything in this matter, it was too late, as next to his surname there was a note: executed on...

While going in the street, I met Sławek with whom we had pickaxed in Oświęcim, dreaming that he would invite me to dinner some time in Warsaw. We both were optimists and, as people told then, we used to think in unrealistic way. And here, we both met again in Warsaw alive. He was carrying some parcel and when he saw me, he nearly dropped it. We dined at his place and according to the menu we had drawn up there in hell.

I lived in a house, from which I went to Oświęcim in 1940 and where I wrote letters to Mrs E.O., but one storey up. It gave me a satisfaction, due to some challenge to the authorities. Nobody

ever came, until the end of the occupation, to Mrs E.O. in the matter of my disappearance from Oświęcim. Also, nobody came to Jasio's sister or to Edek's family.

I presented the plan of the Oświęcim attack to the chief of action planning of Kedyw ("Wilk" – Zygmunt) in autumn 1943, who told me: "When the war is over, I will show you such a file of reports from Oświęcim, where there are also all your reports".

I wrote a last report on the subject of Oświęcim, 20 pages of typescript and on its last page my colleagues wrote in their own hands, what, to whom and when they had reported in this matter. I collected eight such declarations, as the rest of colleagues were dead or were not present in Warsaw.

Apart from my work in some department of the Headquarters, I was busy with taking care of families of prisoners of Oświęcim, whether alive or killed. Colleague 86 helped me in it. Money for allowances were given through a well-conspired cell composed of three ladies 182, who devoted much their work to prisoners and their families. One time I was informed by those ladies there was somebody, in whose area of work Oświęcim was placed. That he was a smart man and he had put up his work excellently, and through him it could be possible to reach prisoners in Oświęcim, as our contact through the local organisation had been just broken. That man was just to leave, and I could not see him, nevertheless because he did his work so well and he confirmed he could get in touch with prisoners, I intended to facilitate his task and I quoted the surname of a colleague, prisoner of Oświęcim, Muzyn, I asked to refer Tomasz and I said him for his guidance, that Tomasz had left in Easter.

Among some colleagues, I met several times my colleagues of Oświęcim, who were not all trustworthy (released in the past), but they also thought I had been released.

On 10 June 1944 in Marszałkowska street, someone suddenly opened his arms and said: "Well, I don't believe you've been let free from Oświęcim." I replied, I also did not believe he had been

set free. It was Olek 167. This lucky devil had always nine spare lives in store, like a cat. As a doctor of the SK, he contrived to get into a transport to Ravensbrück and escaped from there.

Ladies 182 informed me that that man who was working in the area of Oświęcim, was to go there again and he wished to see me. I hurried to the meeting. I came in several minutes before the arrival of that man. The ladies, left alone discreetly in a separate room, waited for the outcome of a meeting of such two aces. I waited for a while, expecting some eagle to come. The door opened and... a small ball rolled in, short, bald, snub-nosed. Well, one's appearance does not prejudge anything. We sat down and that gentleman came to the point, saying the following: "What if I took a plank and painted a Negro? And with that plank with painted Negro I moved towards the Oświęcim wall?"

I stood up, excused and went to the ladies: "With whom have you contacted me? Is it possible to talk to him seriously?"

- Why, yes. He's an excellent organiser and... here they quoted his rank.

I returned and I thought it was evidently his way to begin conversations and I ordered patience to myself. That gentleman, when I took my seat at the table, as he saw that Negro somehow did not suit me, said: "Or perhaps not a Negro, but Saint Thomas, or an Easter cake?"

I choked with silent laughter and I thought I would break my chair, on which I tightly clasped the fingers of my both hands, not to burst to laughter. I stood up and said that today, unfortunately, our conversation could not be concluded, as I had to hurry to some other place. It is not a piece of my fiction, it actually occurred.

In the end of July 1944, a week before the uprising, someone stopped me as I was cycling along Filtrowa Street, he cried "Hello". I stopped reluctantly, as usually in the time of conspiracy. Some gentleman approached me. In the firsts moment I did not recog-

nise him, but it lasted for a moment only. It was my friend of Oświęcim, captain 116.

WARSAW UPRISING OF 1944

Both Jasio and I participated in the uprising in one section. A description of our actions and the death of my friend are included in the history of the 1st Battalion of the “Chrobry Group II”.

Edek got 5 bullets in action, but was lucky to recover.

My friend 25 was badly wounded in action during the uprising.

Also, in an action during the uprising I met my friend 44.

Later, in other places, I met colleagues who were in Oświęcim nearly to the end (January 1945): 183 and 184. And I was very glad, when they talked of the repercussions of our escape through the bakery. That the camp laughed that we had done the camp authorities in the eye, and that there were no repression against our colleagues. Except for the SS-men of our guard who spent some time in the bunker.

ESTIMATION OF NUMBERS OF DEATHS IN OŚWIECIM

Here I quote the number of people who died in Oświęcim.

When I was leaving Oświęcim, I remembered a serial number 121 thousand and some. There were about 23 thousand of those alive, of such ones who had departed in transports or been released. About 97 thousand numbered prisoners died.

It had nothing to do with the number of people, who had been gassed and burnt in masses, unrecorded. Basing on estimations done by those who worked close to that commando, over 2 million such people died.

I quoted that number cautiously, not to overestimate; the daily quoted numbers should rather be discussed in detail.

Colleagues, who were there and witnessed gassings of eight thousand people a day, quote the number of plus/minus five million people.

150

“NOW I WOULD LIKE TO TELL, WHAT I FEEL IN
GENERAL WHILE I AM AMONG PEOPLE”

Now I would like to tell, what I feel in general while I am among people, when I have been placed among them upon my return from a place, of which you could tell indeed: “Who came in, he died. Who came out, he was born anew.” What was my impression, not of the best or the worst ones but generally of the whole human mass, upon my return to life on the Earth.

Sometimes it seemed to me, while walking about a huge house, I suddenly opened the door of a room, were there were children only... “ah!... children are playing...”

Well, the span was too great, between what was important for us and what is deemed important by people, of what people are worried, what delights or troubles them.

But it is not all... Some widespread slipperiness has got too apparent now. Some destructive work to erase the border between truth and falseness was striking. Truth became so extensible that it was stretched, to cover everything what was suitable to be covered. The border between honesty and mere slipperiness was diligently erased.

It is not important what I typed so far on several dozens of those pages, especially for those who will read it as a piece of sensation, but from here I would like to type in such upper-case which is unfortunately unavailable in a typewriter script, that all those heads who, below a beautiful parting on them, have water

inside and are indebted to their mothers for their well-vaulted skulls, so that their water does not leak out – let them give some deeper thought to their own lives, let them look round and let them start, from themselves, their fight against mere falsehood, mendacity, private interest smartly passed for ideas, truth, or even for a great cause.

THE END

Part VII

APPENDIX



EDITOR'S GLOSSARY OF THE CAMP LANGUAGE

The colloquial Polish language, as used by that largest group of Oświęcim prisoners, was specific in that it contained many borrowings from German – the official language of the camp and the native language of its planners, creators and chief managers, Nazi Germans – for things specific for life in the camp. The frequently repeated German words in the English translation render this feature of the Polish original.

Some German words were borrowed into the Polish language used in the camp in a Polonised form (e.g. *rolwaga*, *fleger*). There were some mixed phrases, like the “great postenkette”.

Arbeitsdienst: Work assignment office, also a clerk of it (a prisoner)

Bekleidungskammer: Store of clothes.

Bekleidungswerkstätte: Clothes shops.

Blockführer: Chief of a block (a German official, SS-man).

Blockführerstube: Office of a Blockführer

Blocksperr: Lock-up of blocks, ordered to conduct some repression upon prisoners.

Blockführerstube: Office of a Blockführer

Durchfall: Dysentery

Effektenkammer: Store of belongings (robbed by the German authorities from newly arrived prisoners)

fleger: Polonised form German “Pfleger” - a hospital orderly

Hauptschreibstube: The main chancellery of the camp

HKB: Häftlingskrankenbau Prisoner's hospital.

Industriehof: Industrial area

Kapo: Chief (a prisoner) of a work commando.

grosse / kleine Postenkette: Great (outer) / small (inner) chain of guards

Lagerführer: (abbreviated from the official name: Schutzhaft-lagerführer) Chief of the camp (German official, an SS-man), in charge of Rapportführers, in Oświęcim – Hans Aumeier.

Lagerkapo: The main kapo (a prisoner), in charge of other capos of the camp

Oberkapo: Senior kapo (a prisoner).

Postzensurstelle: Mail censorship office.

rollwaga: Polonised form of German “rollwagen” – a wheeled push cart.

SK: Strafkompagnie Penal company.

Rapportfuhrer: Chief of reports (a German official, SS-man) in charge of Blockführers; responsible for examination of the number of prisoners in the camp

Stammlager: The main (core) camp (Oświęcim); it had a number of sub-camps, among them Brzezinka.

Stehbunker: Prison cell, so small as to make sitting or lying in it impossible.

Strafkompanie: SK Penal company.

Volksdeutsch: Here: A Polish citizen who, during the German occupation of Poland in WWII, accepted German citizenship, what was considered high treason. The word was accepted in Polish language with a connotation “traitor” and a contemptuous tinge. It is also considered offensive.

Zugangs: Newly arrived prisoners

B

THE CAMP HIERARCHY

Hierarchy of German officials (SS-men):

- Schutzhaftlagerführer (abbreviated: Lagerführer) – Hans Aumeier (chief of the camp)
- Rapportführer (chief of reporting)
- Blockführers (chiefs of block)

Sub-ordinated hierarchy of prisoners:

- Lagerkapo (the main capo)
- Oberkapos (senior capos)
- Kapos (chiefs of work commandos)

C

GLOSSARY OF POLISH GIVEN NAMES AND THEIR DIMINUTIVES

Diminutive (Polish)	Basic form (Polish)	Basic form (English)
Bronek	Bronisław	
Czesiek	Czesław	
Edek	Edward	Edward
Janek, Jasiek, Jasio	Jan	John
Kazik, Kazio	Kazimierz	Casimir
Marysia	Maria	Mary
Sławek	Sławomir	
Stasiek, Stasio, Staś	Stanisław	